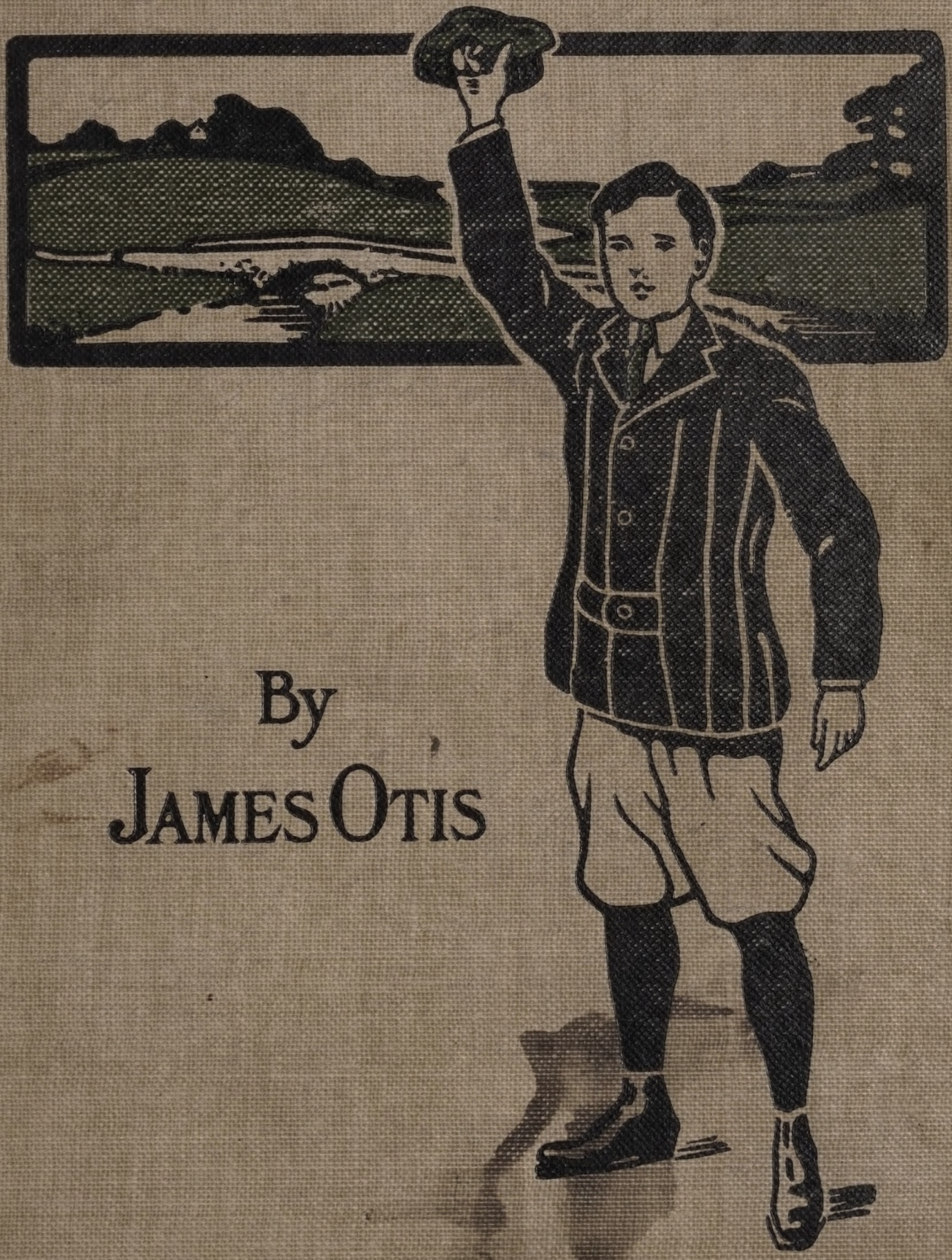
THE CAMP ON INDIAN ISLAND



By
JAMES OTIS

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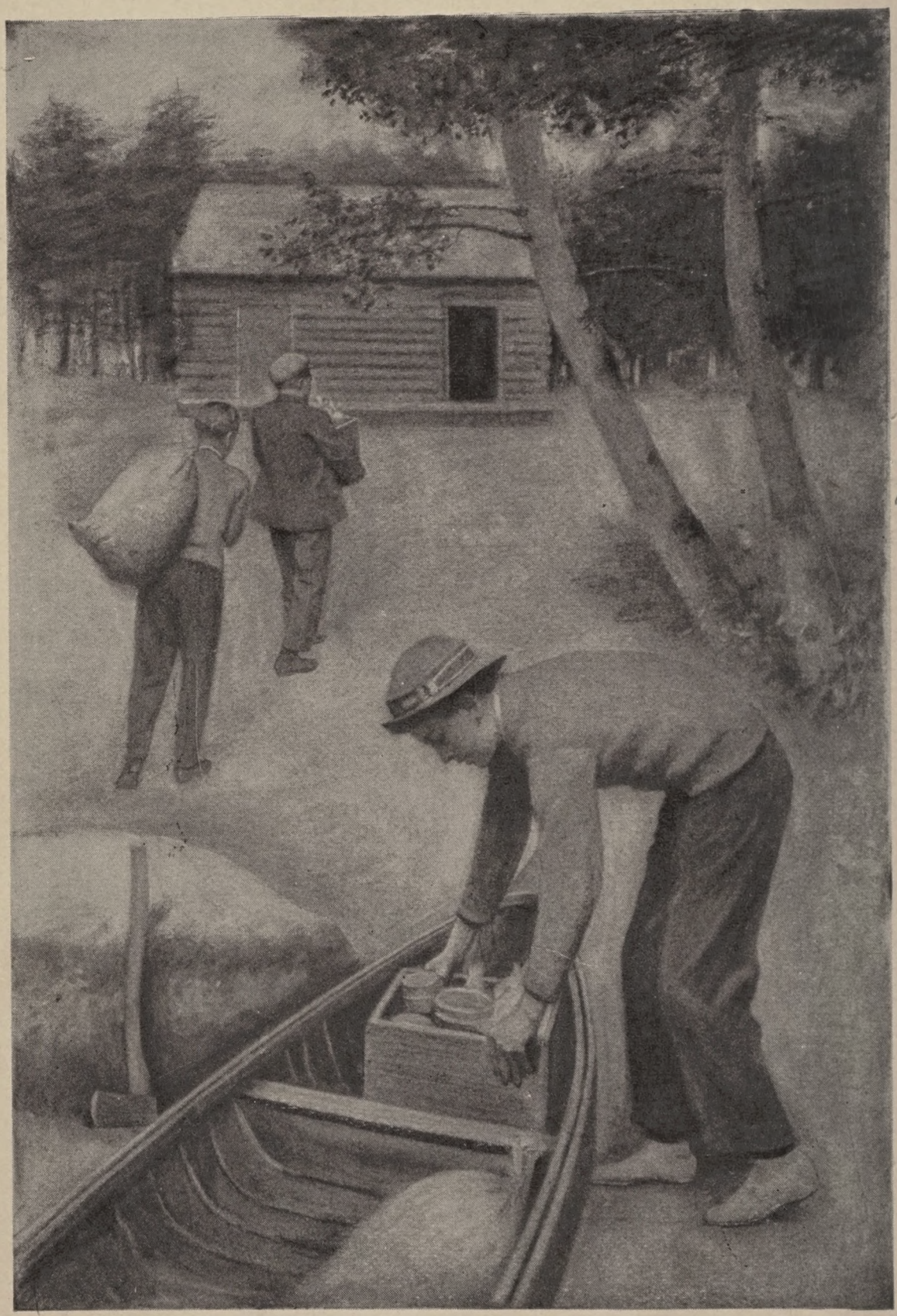

THE BOYS UNLOADED THE CANOE

The Camp On Indian Island

BY JAMES OTIS

AUTHOR OF

"THE CRUISE OF THE SALLY D," "THE BRAGANZA DIAMOND," &C.

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The Camp on Indian Island

The Camp on Indian Island

CHAPTER I

LARRY AND ELISH

When Ruel Bonney and Frank Gilmore set off with their parents to spend the summer at Lake Caughnawaga they did not anticipate a remarkably pleasant outing. It would have pleased them much better if Atlantic City had been decided upon for the summer's outing, where, as Ruel said, "something was moving all the time;" and Frank insisted that "it was just the same as burying themselves to go off into the country, where everything was dead as nails."

The two young gentlemen were cousins and neither had yet arrived at the dignity of sixteen years; but both were confident that they could have selected a much more agreeable place in which to spend the hot days.

"We'll go down in a country town, with nothing to do but sit around on a veranda

hating ourselves," Ruel grumbled when he and his cousin were discussing the matter. "If father had decided to go into the woods, where a fellow might hunt bears and foxes, there would be some sense to it; but a settlement with a name like that—gee!"

"Perhaps there will be plenty of sailing and fishing," Frank said hopefully. "It won't be so bad if we can knock around in a boat all the time."

"Do you suppose either your mother or mine would so much as let us look at a boat?" and now Ruel gave evidence of relapsing into a fit of the sulks. "How was it at Atlantic City last year? It'll be 'Ruel, don't get your feet wet!' or 'Frank, you must put something around your neck, for the air is very damp.' I'm tired of so much coddling, and wish we could do as we wanted to just once."

Despite the dissatisfaction of the boys with the location decided upon in which to spend the summer, the Bonney and Gilmore families left Philadelphia on the day agreed upon, and in due time arrived at the "settlement with the dreadful name."

It proved to be very different from what the boys had fancied. The village of Caughnawaga was not particularly beautiful or interesting; but the lake which was spread out in front of it as far as the eye could reach, dotted with tiny islands and enclosed by what was seemingly a real forest, had possibilities for sport far beyond what could be enjoyed at a fashionable watering place.

"Say, it's not so bad," Ruel said to his cousin on the morning after their arrival, as they viewed the scene from the veranda of the boarding-house, "but I'm thinking it won't do us much good, for the minute either you or I start toward the water somebody will have a fit for fear we'll get our hair damp. If we could learn to swim it would be different; but there's no use thinking of anything so reckless."

Ruel had hardly more than thus begun to grumble when, as he afterward admitted, Frank's father "gave him the surprise of his life" by saying as he joined the lads on the veranda:

"Now, then, you boys are to have all the roughing you've been asking for. Do you see

the island yonder that looks like a hill rising out of the water? It's called Indian Island —perhaps because there are no Indians on it. On it is a small camp of two rooms, so I am told, and it's there you are to stay while we are here, if it pleases you. The families have agreed that you may go your own gait for the next three weeks, with the understanding that you don't spend the time trying to drown yourselves."

"Are we to go off in a boat by ourselves?" Ruel asked, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise sufficiently to speak.

"Surely, otherwise how could you get there? It is agreed that we won't interfere in any way, unless you show yourselves foolishly reckless. There is a boy around the house here who is willing to go with you, and you had better hunt him up in order to form your plans, for it is necessary to lay in provisions, find a boat, get some fishing-tackle, and, in fact, make all your preparations.

"Of course you won't want any advice from those whom you believe have done too much coddling."

Ruel's face reddened as his uncle said this,

for he it was who had objected to the "coddling," but Frank was too thoroughly excited to give any heed to the matter.

"Come on, Ruel, let's find out who is going with us."

Even as he spoke a very small lad with very red hair came from around the corner of the house as if in search of somebody or something, and Frank demanded of him:

"Do you know of any fellow who is going to camp out with us?"

"If you're the fellers from Philadelphy, I'm the one. Seems to me you ain't in any very great hurry to git off, seein's it's so late in the day."

"Late? Why, we've just got out of bed," Ruel cried.

"Why didn't you stay over a spell longer, an' then it would have been time for to-morrow's breakfast. It must be nigh to eight o'clock."

"What time did you get up?"

"Long 'bout four; we don't spend the whole day in bed down this way. Are you fellers goin' over to Indian Island this mornin'?"

"Of course we are, and just as soon as we have had breakfast," Ruel replied promptly. "Uncle Tom said we'd have to lay in provisions, find a boat and all that sort of thing."

"I've fixed the whole outfit, an' been ready since sunrise," said the red-headed boy. "The 'Gracie' 'll tow us over, 'cause it's nigh to four miles from here, an' we don't wanter be all played out with rowin' when we get there."

"What is your name?"

"Larry Duffield. Say, get a move on, will yer? If we hang 'round here all the forenoon Lander Leighton an' his gang'll tumble to what we're up to, an' they'll play the very mischief with us. They allers contrive to spoil everythin'."

"How?"

"Jest by kickin' up a row. There's Bill Dean an' Hot Morgan, who travel with Lander, an' they're allers stickin' their noses inter everything the rest of us fellers try to do. If we can run over to the island without their knowin' what we're about, it'll be all right, so get outside your breakfast without any more foolin', an' I'll see that the 'Gracie' is in shape."

"Who is she?" Frank asked, and Larry replied with a laugh :

"Why, she's the power boat that belongs to this house. We keep her to let when the summer boarders wanter go out sailin' or fishin'. Say, are you ever goin' to get ready?"

The city boys allowed themselves to be literally pushed into the dining-room by the energetic Larry, for both were so bewildered by the unexpected information that they were to be allowed to "camp out" alone, or with no other companion than the small, red-headed lad, as to be literally incapable of speech.

That this plan had already been thoroughly arranged by the heads of the two families could be understood by the fact that neither Frank's nor Ruel's mother had anything to say by word of caution against going near the water, or into a boat, and indeed, the boys were just a trifle disappointed because every one treated it as a matter of course that they should be allowed to spend their time on the island, instead of at the boarding-house. It did not seem natural to be thus permitted to do as they pleased, without the least little

word in the way of advice, and Ruel began to fancy that there would not be so much fun in "roughing it" as he had believed.

"You can come back for anything you may need in the way of provisions or clothing," Mr. Gilmore said as the boys rose from the table after a hurried and unsatisfactory meal. "Larry will look out for you, and I advise that you allow him to take charge of the business, although there is no reason why you shouldn't engineer matters yourselves, if it seems that you can do it better."

The boys kissed their mothers and sisters, almost wishing one or the other would have something to say in the way of caution against this or that pleasure which had heretofore been forbidden, and even as they left the dining-room there was a feeling not unlike homesickness in their hearts, for it was in some way as if they had been neglected.

However, this soon passed off when they joined Larry, who had been impatiently awaiting them on the veranda, and listened to his plans for the future three weeks, which were to be filled as full of sport as was possible.

"It'll be a high old time if Lander Leigh-

ton's gang don't smell us out," Master Duffield said confidently, as he led the two boys down the narrow path to the lake. "Your fathers have allowed that we can get everythin' we want, an' you'll find the best canoe on the lake layin' ready for you. I've got all the grub we can eat in a week, an' plenty of fish-lines. There's dishes, an' all that kind of stuff in the camp, so we're goin' to be mighty well fixed."

Then the boys set out for the shore of the lake, Ruel and Frank wondering ever so little why their mothers had not appeared to see them off; but the disappointment was partially forgotten when they came to the water's edge and saw the launch "Gracie."

She was a dainty little craft, and it seemed really too bad to use her for purposes of towing, as was intended on this morning.

"Yes, she's all right," Larry said carelessly in reply to the praise bestowed by his companions; "but she can't begin to run as fast as a craft on the other side of the lake that's run by Mr. Woodward, who owns a summer cottage over there. This is the canoe we're to use while campin'," and Larry Duffield

leaped into a light craft lying at the side of the small pier literally loaded with a general assortment of such things as might be needed by the "campers."

"Can you run the 'Gracie'?" Ruel asked nervously.

"Elish does that, an' here he comes. Wouldn't you think he had all day to do nothin' in, by the way he moves?"

"Elish" was not coming very rapidly; but since the only work on hand just then was to tow the boys over to Indian Island, he believed there was no good reason why he should exert himself very much, particularly since the morning was exceedingly warm.

"Now, then, if you'll get a move on, we'll go over," Larry said, impatiently, as he made the canoe fast to the stern of the launch, and beckoned for the city boys to get aboard.

"What're you in sich a terrible pucker about?" Elish asked in a drawling voice. "I'm allowin' you get enough of Indian Island before this summer's over, without breakin' your neck to get there so soon."

"But I'm afraid Lander Leighton, or some of his gang, will find out what's in the wind,"

Larry explained. "If they know we're goin' over to Indian Island there'll be trouble."

"I reckon Leander knows all 'bout it," Elish replied, as he stepped gingerly aboard the "Gracie," as if afraid of overturning her. "I saw him snoopin' 'round here a spell ago, an' a feller wouldn't need more'n one eye to know what was afoot, if he looked inter the canoe."

Larry showed very plainly that he was vexed, but when Frank would have questioned him regarding what it was possible for Leander, or "Lander," Leighton to do, he pretended not to hear, but said impatiently to Elish:

"Well, why don't you start her up? We're all ready, an' there ain't any sense in loafin' 'round here."

With her cargo and crew of three boys the little canoe was deeply loaded, but there was not a ripple on the water, and, unless the weight was suddenly shifted, there could be no danger of overturning, therefore, with a careless caution to "mind their eye an' not wiggle 'round," Elish sent the "Gracie" ahead at a fairly good rate of speed.

"Does any one live on the island where we are going?" Ruel asked when they were fairly under way, and Larry replied with a laugh:

"You won't think so when you see it. The whole place ain't much bigger'n our back yard, an' there's nothin' on it but the camp where we're goin' to stop. It's a dandy spot for a good time, if the other fellers will let us alone. They come over to fish now and then, an' they've sorter got to feel they own the island, I guess."

"How many are there in the crowd?"

"Three, an' they can kick up a bigger row than any other gang of the same size you ever run across. Seems like all they studied up was how to make trouble for somebody else."

"Have we got a right to stay in the camp?" Ruel asked, looking exceedingly savage for the moment.

"Of course we have, seein's how your two fathers have hired the whole island."

"Then I'd like to see only three fellows make very much trouble for us. Frank and I didn't come down here for a fight; but we don't intend to let a lot of country guys interfere with our pleasure."

Larry looked scrutinizingly at his companions, as if mentally measuring them against "Lander Leighton's gang," and then said thoughtfully:

"I ain't certain how we'd come out in a reg'lar row. You fellers don't show up as if you could cut any great figger when it comes to a fuss with that crowd; but, as father says, you never can tell by the length of a cat's tail how far she can jump."

Neither Ruel nor Frank made any reply, nor did the occupants of the canoe indulge in any further conversation until the "Gracie" rounded the point of the island and Elish cried:

"Stand by there to haul in your painter, for I reckon this is as far as I need tow her. Be careful to haul that canoe out of the water when you ain't usin' her, an' keep your eyes peeled for Leander's crowd. I've got it in mind that they'll try to be funny."

Then the "Gracie" chugged off in the direction from which she had just come, and the three lads were left to make the landing, and set the new home to rights, as best they could.

CHAPTER II

MAKING CAMP

THE camp on Indian Island was only a small shanty, hardly more than twenty feet long by ten wide, and divided into two small rooms, in one of which were the stove, cooking utensils and a table, while on the sides of the front, or larger, apartment were four rude bunks, similar to those found on board a vessel. Two or three chairs, a rack for guns and fishing-rods, a long, low chest-like locker, and a cracked looking-glass made up the list of furnishings.

It was as rough and unhome-like an abode as the most enthusiastic camper-out could have desired, and to Ruel and Frank it appeared the most desirable place in which to spend a summer vacation that could have been found in a long search. Situated in the midst of a thicket of fir trees, one could easily guess that it would be infested by mosquitoes when the wind was not blowing at least

half a gale, and at the same time be wickedly hot.

"It's just great!" Ruel cried as he came up from the shore staggering under a heavy burden of camp equipage. "When we get settled here I'd like to see any three fellows who could make very much trouble for us!"

"We won't hunt after them, but we'll make it uncomfortable for that Lander gang if they come nosing around," Frank added, wiping the perspiration from his face, for bringing a heavy load up from the shore, even though the distance could not have been more than thirty yards, was very much like a hard task.

"You ain't countin' on stoppin' work so soon, are ye?" Larry asked in surprise and disapprobation. "It'll take us a good half day to get settled down in shape, even if we jump to it all the time."

"What's to be done?" Ruel asked, springing to his feet to show that he was willing, if not eager, to perform his share of the necessary labor.

"Done? Why, first we've got to haul the canoe up under the bushes where the sun

won't pelt right down on her. Then there's a slat of wood to be cut, 'less you count on dribblin' the job along three or four times every day; we've got to pack this stuff away where the mice an' squirrels can't raise hob with it, an' mother said we must wash every dish in hot water, 'cause they've been gatherin' the dust since last fall, when a party of fishermen camped here."

"Is the fishing good around here?" and now Frank showed signs of increasing animation.

"Waal, it's a little late in the season now; but I reckon we can get a mess of pickerel whenever you hanker for that kind of eatin'. We'll give 'em a whirl early to-morrow mornin', an' see what's doin'. One of you will have to come with me so's to haul the canoe up, an' the other can be choppin' wood if he feels like it."

There was nothing in the way of sport in hewing saplings into fuel with an ax that looked as if it had never been sharpened, therefore the boys went to the shore and unloaded the canoe. As they drew her well up on shore Larry suddenly pointed out at the

lake. Not far away was a boat containing three persons.

"That's Lander's gang," he announced confidently. "They're watchin' out to see what we're doin'!"

"It won't be wise for them to try to play any games on us, for now that I know we've hired this island, and have a right to be here, I'll make it warm for anybody who comes fooling around," and Ruel looked particularly fierce.

Larry did not reply to this remark; but his companions noted with a certain sense of uneasiness that he kept a sharp watch upon the enemy's craft, even leaving the camp from time to time after having begun work there, in order to make certain Leander and his friends had not approached near enough to do mischief.

"Does your father know that Leander Leighton is likely to make trouble for us—that is, if we let him come ashore?" Ruel asked as he noted Larry's anxiety.

"I wasn't crazy enough to say anythin' to him 'bout it, when your folks wanted to hire me same's they did the island."

"And did father really hire you?" Frank asked in surprise.

"Waal, he said as how he'd allow a little in the way of pay if I'd come along to keep an eye on you chaps."

"There!" Ruel cried. "I knew there was something like a string on us! It seemed queer father was so willing to let us come over here by ourselves. And to think that he believed a little fellow like you, who're not as big as either of us, should be sent as guardian!"

"As what?" Larry demanded suspiciously.

"To take care of us—that was what you said."

"Waal, I reckon your folks thought, seein's how I'd allers lived here, that I might know more 'bout campin' than you fellers did. Besides, I can cook quite a bit, an' I don't s'pose you know anythin' 'bout that, seein's you've stayed 'round in a city where the people buy all their stuff outer a shop."

"Don't you think city people ever cook anything?" Frank asked with a hearty laugh, and Larry replied earnestly:

"Elish says they buy everythin' all fixed

up ready to eat, an' he oughter know. He's been to Boston twice."

It was not an easy matter for the lads to keep their faces straight, as Larry thus explained why he was familiar with the ways of those who lived in cities. Fully a minute elapsed before Ruel dared trust himself to ask:

"Why didn't you tell your father that you were afraid Leander might try to make mischief?"

"I wasn't sich a chump as that, 'cause if I had he mightn't have let me come, an' I didn't wanter miss a snap like this. There's a big pile of difference 'tween loafin' here on Indian Island, with nothin' much to do, an' runnin' your legs off after city boarders who can't get things to suit 'em, no matter how hard you try. Why, we had a man here from New York last summer who thought Elish an' I shouldn't sit down to the same table as him, 'cause we hadn't washed our hands, an' I'd scrubbed mine that very mornin' brighter'n a new tin pan."

"And you went in to breakfast with him?" Ruel asked, his voice trembling with suppressed mirth.

"It was supper when he raised the row. Terribly fussy that old chap was; but they said he had piles an' piles of money."

"Hadn't you washed your hands since early in the morning?"

"'Course not; what do you think, that I've got nothin' else to do when the summer boarders are here but scrub myself? My hands wasn't dirty, an' father allowed they wasn't, 'cause I hadn't been doin' anythin' but catch a few pickerel."

Larry had not been idle while thus explaining his trials with the summer boarders; he had arranged the belongings brought in the canoe in a way to make the camp look more homelike, and, this done, he proceeded to build a fire with such fuel as had been left in the kitchen by the previous occupants.

It was not yet noon when he finished his work, and then the campers ate a picnic dinner, Larry claiming that there was no good reason why he should give evidence of his ability as a cook while there was so much food ready to be served.

During the afternoon the boys roamed over the small island until they had thoroughly

explored every portion. Then a short excursion was made in the canoe, and when they had had enough of this sport Larry proposed that they go ashore and "loaf" the remainder of the day.

"There's no sense in gettin' all wore out before we're settled down," he said with the air and in the tone of one who knows. "If you're keen to try the fishin' we'll take a whack at it in the mornin', for that's the best time; but the wood hasn't been cut yet, an' there ain't as much in the kitchen as we'll need if you're thinkin' of havin' coffee to drink for your breakfast."

Larry's "loafing" consisted in what the boys from the city thought very hard work, for each in turn swung the dull ax until fuel sufficient for two days' consumption had been piled up just outside the kitchen door, and then all three of the lads were ready to take a rest.

Supper was served in the same style and manner as dinner, and when the shadows of evening began to gather Ruel proposed that two or three candles be lighted, for the silence was beginning to be oppressive.

Larry rolled into one of the bunks, "jest to rest his legs," and in a twinkling his heavy breathing told that he was asleep.

Ruel walked to and fro, stopping now and then to listen, although nothing could be heard save the faint murmur of the night voices, until the sound of his own footsteps caused him to feel nervous, and he said in a whisper to Frank:

"Do you suppose we ought to watch for those fellows?"

"They don't seem to trouble Larry very much," and Frank pointed toward the bunk, where their guide was sleeping noisily. "How could we do any watching now that it is dark?"

Ruel remained silent for a full minute, and then going softly to the door he stood in a listening attitude until his cousin said, irritably and nervously:

"Why don't you sit down? What's the use of mooning around as if you thought something terrible was likely to happen?"

"I thought I heard some one moving around outside," Ruel replied, as he tiptoed his way to one of the bunks.

Then it was that Frank fancied he heard an unusual sound, and he in turn went to the door, moving to and fro as if afraid some one on the outside might suspect that he was on the alert, and in turn Ruel said with a certain tremor of the voice, which he could not suppress :

"Say, this isn't just what I call having a tremendously jolly time! If you've got to walk around in such a mysterious manner, do speak now and then ; it's so quiet here that I can almost hear myself think. Waken Larry, will you? He'll know whether anything is going on outside."

Frank very quickly did as his cousin desired, and Larry was out of the bunk in a twinkling, asking as he came to his feet much after the fashion of a steel spring :

"What's the matter? Anythin' gone wrong?"

"We thought there was a queer noise outside. What's the use of going to bed before the evening has much more than begun? Ruel can't sleep any better than I can, and it's no more than fair you should keep your eyes open a while longer."

"Of course you can't sleep now, seein's you didn't get up till pretty near noon. It's time all hands of us turned in, an' that's what we will do soon's we take a turn outside so's to make certain everythin's right. What did the noise you heard sound like?"

"I don't know," Frank said hesitatingly, not caring to admit that it was more than possible he had imagined it. "Everything was so quiet that a very faint noise sounded loud."

Larry threw open the door without hesitation, saying as he disappeared in the darkness:

"Come on; we'll have a look at the boat, though there ain't any need of fussin' 'bout her, 'cause she was hauled up all right. I'm sure of that."

Ruel and Frank followed him very willingly, for neither cared to remain in the camp alone, and once in the open air both lads felt much better in mind. The soft lip-lip-lipping of the water on the sandy shore sounded friendly, and the swaying of the bushes was soothing rather than terrifying. It was the shadow set in motion by the flaring candles in the scantily-furnished camp

which had caused the nervous feeling, and both mentally reproached themselves for having been so foolish as to be very nearly frightened by the knowledge that they were alone on the island.

Larry led the way to the shore, moving swiftly, as if knowing beyond a doubt that there was nothing in the vicinity to work him harm; but, having come to the bushes where it was believed the canoe had been left, he groped about like one bewildered.

"We must have left her further along the shore. I was mighty sure this was the place, though."

"Isn't the boat there?" Ruel asked in something very like alarm, and Larry replied stoutly:

"I got fooled by the bushes. Most likely we left her further along. Things look different in the night from what they do in the daytime."

Then Larry felt here and there as if the canoe was so small that he might readily have walked over her unwittingly, until, growing anxious, the boys forgot the fears that had been excited by the silence of the

night, and joined in the search, walking up and down the shore, scrutinizing carefully every clump of bushes within a quarter of a mile before the disagreeable truth came home to them. The canoe was gone!

"That miserable gang of Lander's has lugged her off," Larry shrieked rather than said. "An' to think that I went to sleep like any swell when I knew they'd been 'round here."

For the moment Ruel and Frank could not understand that the loss of the boat was anything serious. They were within a few miles of the boarding-house, and Elish surely would come over in the "Gracie" within a short time. All this they said to Larry.

"H'm," he snapped. "What you talkin' about? I heard the father of one of you say that he counted on lettin' you have all the campin' you wanted, an' Elish got strict orders not to come 'round this way. We're reg'larly wrecked, an' we'll stay where we are till some fool fisherman, who oughter know better than to think he can catch anythin' nearabout this island, blunders over here!"

CHAPTER III

"LANDER'S" GANG

But for the fact that Larry was in such distress of mind, the situation would not have appeared so serious to the city boys, who could not fancy how much hardship might come to them while they were within sight of their own people.

But Larry stood straining his eyes into the darkness as he brandished his clenched fists, pouring out a torrent of invectives against those who had robbed him, until Ruel said impatiently:

"What's the sense of making so much noise? You're not doing any good, except to those who have taken the boat, for it stands to reason they are close by, listening to your wild talk. If you want to please the robbers, keep on; if not, let's wait till we are where it will be possible to talk without being overheard."

Larry turned quickly to look at this city

boy who had seemingly taken command of the party. Now the one feature of this expedition which had particularly pleased Larry was the proposition by Mr. Gilmore that he accompany Ruel and Frank to give them the benefit of his experience in the sport of camping out. He had so twisted this in his own mind as to really believe that he had much the same as been appointed guardian to the fellows from Philadelphia, and Ruel's sharp words sounded to him much like mutiny against lawfully constituted authority.

"I thought you'd never been campin' before?" he said, and Ruel replied with a laugh:

"I haven't. But a fellow need not live all his life in the country in order to understand that you were playing the idiot by standing there waving your arms, and threatening to do what those fellows knew was impossible. It doesn't seem to me that we're in such terrible straits because the canoe has been stolen. As a matter of course we'll have to hug the island pretty snug, but after a while our parents will send out here to learn why we don't show ourselves."

"But what'll we do for somethin' to eat?" Larry asked as if he had personal cause for anger against this city fellow who was showing himself so self-reliant.

"You brought over a big lot of food," Frank suggested.

"That's true enough; but it won't last forever, an' then what?"

"There surely is enough for three or four days."

"That's so; but what about it when there's nothin' left—not so much as a crumb?" and Larry spoke as if he had worsted his companions in a weighty argument.

"Why, then we'll begin to worry," Ruel replied with a laugh; "but so long as there is no show for suffering, it strikes me we had better save our breath and our temper. Come back to the camp, and we'll talk it over."

"Do you reckon I'm goin' to let that miserable gang steal our canoe without doin' the least little thing?" Larry asked angrily.

"As I look at it, you can't help yourself, and I fail to see that you are bettering matters by howling," Ruel said, all his fears of the

silence and the night having vanished before Larry's outburst of vain wrath.

"I'll have 'em arrested, that's what I'll do. Lander Leighton shall find out that he can't go 'round stealin' things without gettin' hisself inter jail."

"Very well, you stay here till they come back. Then you can nab him and put him in jail," said Ruel.

He turned to retrace his steps, Frank following the example, but before they had taken a dozen steps, Larry was at their heels, the three walking in single file along the narrow path which led to the shanty.

Now it was that the city boys began to appreciate the beauty of the night, and the peacefulness of their surroundings. It was their first real glimpse at the wonder and majesty of solitude, and it is little wonder if, for the moment, they forgot that which had so aroused Larry's anger and excited his fears.

Before gaining the shelter of the camp, however, the boys, even including Larry, were so startled that more than one exclamation of fear burst from their lips, for the night

air bore to them what sounded like a mournful cry :

"Hell-o-o-o! Hell-o-o-o!"

"What is it?" Frank asked in tremulous tones as he clutched his cousin's arm nervously, and Ruel, no less alarmed, turned to Larry.

"Did you hear that?"

"Of course I heard it!" Larry replied with nervous anger. "Do you think I'm deaf an' dumb?"

"Hell-o-o-o! Hell-o-o-o!"

Frank tried to force Ruel into a run that they might gain the shelter of the shanty, but the latter held his ground, saying manfully, even though his teeth were much the same as chattering with fear :

"I won't run away from what can't be seen. Perhaps it's an owl. I've heard that they make a mournful cry in the night."

"Do yer s'pose I don't know an owl when I hear one?" Larry cried hotly, at the same time edging his way a trifle nearer Ruel. "That never was any bird; it must be a ghost! I've heard that there were strange goin's on here when the Indians ——"

"Don't be a fool!" Ruel cried angrily. "If you're going back to the time when the Indians lived here, in order to find out what made the noise, it's we who should have been sent to keep an eye on you. Now I ——"

"Hell-o-o-o! Where's yer boat? Where's yer boat?"

"It's that gang of Lander's layin' 'round here to poke fun at us 'cause we were so foolish as to leave the canoe where they could get at it!" Larry exclaimed with a long-drawn sigh of relief. "I knowed it must be something like that."

"Then why did you begin to talk of ghosts and Indians?" Frank cried, angry with himself because of having been the first to show signs of fear.

"That jest come inter my head, an' I let it out, but you fellers mustn't think I didn't know it was Lander all the time. Now I'll let that thievin' bully know what I think of him," and Larry stepped forward a pace as if to make reply to the ghostly hail, when Ruel clapped his hand firmly over the boy's mouth.

"Don't make the same mistake again,

Larry. What's the use of swapping words with those fellows? That's just what they are hoping you'll do. There's no fun for them in stealing our canoe, if they can't hear us whining over it."

"Are you goin' to stand here an' let 'em say all they wanter?" Larry asked indignantly.

"I fail to see how you can prevent them," Ruel replied with a laugh, "and it strikes me that we would be wiser to give them a chance to show themselves. Then we can swear that they had our boat in tow, if such happens to be the case; but, as it is now, we can only say it is our belief they took her."

Larry was not so dull but that he understood in a twinkling what Ruel meant, and he turned to retrace his steps, moving cautiously through the bushes, followed by the city boys, until the three stood on the shore near the place from which the canoe had been taken.

"Hell-o-o-o!" came across the water, this time sounding nearer and more distinct, thus showing that the mischief-makers were approaching the island.

"Don't make the least noise, and they'll probably land," whispered Ruel, stepping yet nearer the water, that he might, by pulling aside the bushes, have a view of such portion of the lake as lay directly in front of the little group.

By this time it was possible to hear the sound of oars and low conversation, mingled now and then with a laugh of triumph or anticipation, and once more was it necessary for Ruel to restrain Larry from giving words to his wrath.

Nearer and nearer came the night prowlers, until the boys in hiding could make out the boat and her occupants with reasonable clearness. Behind the craft, in which were three persons, could be seen the canoe, towing by a short painter, and Ruel thought the time had come when they might be able to get a confession of what had been done.

"Now you can say all that you've been bottling up," he whispered to Larry; "but first ask if they have our boat; we want them to own up good and fair, so it can be proven who took her."

Eager to give vent to his wrath, Larry

stepped outside the screen of bushes and cried:

"Hello, Lander!"

"Well, what d'yer want?"

"What made you take our canoe? Don't you know we can't get off this island without her?"

"'Course we do, an' that's why we hauled her off," was the reply in mocking tones. "We're allowin' that you an' the dudes will stay on Indian Island till you get tired. This ain't the place for city galoots to come an' put on airs, an' we'll show 'em so before you get your canoe back ag'in. We're goin' to take her over on the other shore, an' then come back to thump the life outer them summer boarders!"

By this time Larry was actually dancing with rage, so angry that it was impossible for him to speak distinctly, and Ruel showed himself as he shouted:

"We were only waiting for you to admit the stealing of our boat, and when we can get word ashore, which will be sooner or later, but within a reasonably short time, you shall have a taste of the law. I don't fancy that

country louts have any more right to steal than we city dudes. What is law for one fits the other, I guess."

A howl of derision went up from those in the boat, but Ruel noted with no little satisfaction that they did not yell quite so loudly as before, which, to him, was good proof that his words had had some effect.

"Jest wait till Elish an' I get hold of you villains!" Larry cried as he ran to and fro on the shore waving his arms frantically, and Frank seized him quickly, whispering as he dragged him behind the bushes:

"Can't you understand that you are doing just what those chaps want? They won't get any fun out of this night's work if we're not provoked into showing just how angry we are. Leave Ruel to deal with them, and I promise he'll soon have them feeling mighty uncomfortable."

"We're comin' ashore an' thump the life outer you!" Leander cried when his companions were at an end of their hooting, and Ruel replied placidly:

"That is just what will please us. We city dudes don't pride ourselves on being bruisers,

but I'm allowing that we can polish you off to-night, and see that you are arrested later. Come along, do!"

"Wait till we leave this boat where you can't lay hands on her, an' then we'll come over an' give you sich a dressin' down as you never had!" one of Leander's comrades cried, and Ruel said with a laugh:

"We'll wait all right, because we can't do anything else, and we'll do our best to give you a lively time. Don't stay away any longer than is absolutely necessary."

"We'll come back sooner'n you'll want to see us," Leander replied angrily, and Ruel said in a low tone to his companions:

"We've succeeded in making him feel a bit uncomfortable, or I'm mistaken. He isn't doing quite so much crowing now."

Larry would have added some threats to what Ruel had said, but Frank prevented him forcibly, saying in the meanwhile:

"Can't you see that the matter is left just as it should be? There, they are turning around to go back, which is something they wouldn't have done so soon if they were feeling as well as when they came up."

"But you heard what Lander said 'bout comin' back to serve us out?"

"Yes, and I don't fancy that any threats you might make would cause him to change his mind. I am hoping he will come, and right soon, too."

"Lander is big enough to eat two just like you," said Larry, as if taking pride in the size of the fellow who, probably, was ring-leader in the mischief.

"Well, you know it isn't always the size that counts," Frank replied, with a laugh. "I'm thinking it won't be quite so easy to eat Ruel and me as you seem to think; at all events, we are ready to take our chances, and if you are afraid of the bully, stay in the camp, where he can't get at you."

"I ain't afraid," Larry replied bravely; "but I know what that gang can do!"

"Wait till you see what we can do," Ruel said with a laugh. "Those fellows seem to be in a hurry to get away, and I'm of the belief that they won't make any very great haste to come back."

Leander and his party were indeed rowing their best, and had seemingly lost

all desire to taunt those whom they had wronged.

"What you goin' to do now?" Larry asked, after he and the city boys had watched the receding craft until she was no more than a blur on the dark waters.

"If you really think they dare come back, we'll stand watch, so that we can't be taken by surprise ——"

"They'll come, dead sure, 'cause Lander is a great hand to start a fight," Larry said in tremulous tones, and it was evident that his fear was rapidly getting the better of him.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE

THE city boys were not inclined to look upon the matter as anything so very serious. Even though Leander and his followers had shown that they dared to steal the canoe, thereby making themselves liable to the penalties of the law, it did not seem probable the young roughs would go so far as to make an unprovoked attack, and so Ruel stated when summing up the situation, as the three walked slowly back to camp.

"You don't know the gang as well as I do," Larry said despondently. "They'd rather fight than eat, an' most likely Lander thinks it would be a big feather in his cap if he thumped a city dude."

"I'd like to know where he sees anything dudish about us," Frank said with a laugh, and Larry replied quickly:

"Them fellers call everybody who wears clean clothes the same name. They're a

tough lot, an' I oughter fixed it with Elish so's he'd keep his eye out on the island, 'cause it was dead certain they'd make trouble. I told you so."

"I don't believe in a boy's going around fighting," Ruel said, thoughtfully, "or bragging as to what he can do with his fists, but if those fellows try to make trouble for us, when we haven't interfered with them in any way, there's just a chance they'll get the worst of it."

"We can't keep ourselves shut up in the camp all the time," Larry wailed, and Ruel added, decidedly:

"I'm not counting that we'll do anything of the kind. As a matter of fact, if there's to be a row, that is the very place we should keep away from."

"Do you mean that we oughter stay where they can get their hands on us?"

"I'm not counting on giving them the chance to get the best of us, as could be done if we shut ourselves up in the camp, because by fastening the door on the outside it would be possible for them to do as they pleased. What do you say, Frank, to hiding in the

bushes near the shore, where we can see when they land, and rush them at the first fair chance?"

"That suits me, and if we do the business properly those fellows won't have any great desire to pay us another visit. Larry says that our fathers hired this island, together with all that is on it, therefore we've got the right to defend what is our property so long as the rent is paid."

"I tell you we'd get the worst of it!" Larry cried in terror. "The only show for us is to hug the camp mighty close an' prevent them from comin' inside."

"Then we'd be cooped up exactly to their liking," Frank replied. "Ruel is right when he proposes that we get in the first blow by jumping them from behind. If you are so frightened, Larry, you may keep out of the row entirely. We two can look after them, I fancy, if we take the rascals by surprise."

"Of course I'm bound to do my share of the fightin', 'cause I was hired to keep an eye on you fellers; but it's certain they'll serve us out in great shape!"

"I'm thinking we're the ones who should be paid for looking after you," Ruel said with a laugh. "I'm willing to agree that you can give us points on camping; but when it comes to defending yourself from those who haven't the shadow of a right or reason for making trouble, you're not in the game for a little minute. We'll close the doors and windows of the camp, to make it appear that we have shut ourselves in, and then go back to the shore. It won't be a bad idea to look up some clubs, for I'm not of the mind that we need be very careful with these wonderful Caughnawaga fighters."

Larry was only too willing to provide the party with weapons, and while his companions were attending to the shanty, he cut three good thick sticks, which, after being trimmed, gave promise of being most effective weapons.

Ruel and Frank locked the door of the camp; fastened the shutters slightly ajar, but in such a manner that they could not readily be opened from the outside, and left two candles burning on the top of the stove where there would be no danger of starting a con-

flagration when they had burned to the end of the wicks.

Then the boys went back to the shore, Larry following unwillingly in the rear, and in a thick clump of bushes, near the spot from which the canoe had been taken, a snug hiding-place was found.

Ruel took the precaution of cutting away some of the foliage to permit of a good view over the lake, and then joined his comrades, saying as he nestled down by Frank's side:

"I believe we're losing a night's rest for nothing, because it doesn't seem probable those fellows will dare to come back; but if they should do so, we are in shape to give them the surprise of their lives. We'll wait here two or three hours, and if they haven't shown themselves by that time it will be proof that Larry has been more frightened than hurt, for ——"

"It doesn't look as if they intended to keep us waiting very long," Frank said as he parted the foliage in order to have a better view of the lake. "If that dark spot over yonder isn't a moving boat, then I never saw one."

"That's what it is!" Larry whispered excitedly as he bent over Frank in order that he might see more clearly. "They're comin' back, jest as Lander threatened, an' we're likely to get it mighty hot if you fellers stick to your way of runnin' things."

"We surely shall stick to it," Ruel said with a laugh. "If you want to take your chances in the camp, now is the time to run up there and lock yourself in; we'll stay where we are."

During a full half minute Larry stood as if undecided. It was evident that he was eager to take advantage of the permission; but yet, however dangerous the alternative seemed, he did not care to thus plainly proclaim himself as having less courage than these despised city fellows.

"I reckon I'd better stay and keep an eye on you," he said, hesitatingly, "'cause that's what I agreed to do; but all the same it's silly to stay here till they come."

"Won't take long to find out," Ruel said grimly. "Those fellows are rowing fast, and we shan't be idle many minutes."

By this time it was possible to hear the sound of oars and a few moments later the hum of conversation, telling that the enemy was approaching at a good rate of speed.

"You follow me, Frank, when I rush out," Ruel said in a whisper. "We'll do our level best at the beginning, and if they show fight we may have to suffer for trying to surprise them; but I'm counting on hurting some of that crowd. Larry can stay here or come on at our heels just as he thinks safest. Now keep still as mice till it's time to begin the battle."

There was no question but that Larry would obey this last command. He had thrown himself face downward upon the ground when it was known that Leander and his following were near at hand, and except for a long-drawn sigh now and then no sound escaped his lips.

Those who were bent on whipping the "dudes" appeared to have no idea that the city boys might defend themselves. They came rapidly on, running the bow of the boat into the sand within a dozen feet of where the defenders of the island were hidden, and

clambered out of their boat without any apparent thought that it might be necessary to move silently.

"I reckon we'd better not let the dudes know we're here till all hands are close up to the camp. Larry has most likely locked the shanty doors, but I know a trick of gettin' in at the kitchen window, an' if we can catch 'em asleep we'll have great fun with 'em," Leander said, addressing his following as if he were a general leading a regiment of soldiers to battle.

"But you ain't said yet what we'd do to 'em," "Hot," otherwise known as Horace Morgan, whispered impatiently.

"We'll thump the dudes till they beg us to stop, an' I ain't certain but we'd better lug Larry off same's Bill wants to do. It would be a big joke to leave them city fellers here alone two or three days."

"Where would you keep Larry all that time?" Bill Dean asked. "His folks would be lookin' for him before then."

"How would they know we had him?" Leander asked sharply. "We'll keep him in Haley's barn till we see Elish comin' out this

way in the power boat, an' then let him loose."

"But he'll tell his folks that we were the ones who lugged him off," Hot suggested, with just a shade of fear in his tones.

"Don't run away with any such idee as that," Leander replied, with a scornful laugh. "Larry's sich a coward that we can make him hold his tongue by threatenin' to thump the life outer him."

Ruel pinched the prostrate Larry to make certain he was giving due attention, and in another instant the intruders had begun the march up the narrow path leading to the camp.

"Now!" Ruel whispered to his cousin, and in a twinkling both lads were running at full speed, but silently as shadows, in the rear of the enemy, Larry following simply because he did not dare to remain behind alone.

So unsuspicious of danger were Leander and his following that Ruel was within five feet of the hindermost, who was Bill Dean, before that young prowler heard anything betokening danger, and then he did not have time to turn his head before Ruel dealt him

such a blow across the legs as brought him to the ground like a log.

"Come on, fellows!" Ruel shouted at the full strength of his lungs. "Let 'em have a dose!"

As he thus spoke his club came down across Leander's shoulder, causing that bully to shriek with pain, and at the same instant Frank gave "Hot" Morgan such a poke in the back as tumbled him headlong.

Two of those who had intended to thump the "dudes" were lying at full length amid the bushes, and the leader was howling with pain, although the battle had hardly begun.

If Larry had lent a hand just at that moment his old-time enemies might have received such a lesson as would not soon have been forgotten; but, fearing what might be done in the future, after the "dudes" had gone home, he held himself aloof, thus giving Bill Dean an opportunity to scramble to his feet and make a dash for the shore just as Ruel and Frank leaped upon Leander and "Hot."

In passing, Bill gave Larry a blow full in the face, and then kept on at full speed until he had pushed the boat off into deep water,

where, after scrambling into her, he remained shrieking for his comrades to join him.

Ruel was bent on punishing Leander to the full extent of his ability, and to that end made an attempt to trip the other up; but the bushes interfered with his movements, and before he could deliver another blow, the leader of the invaders had taken to his heels, yelling in very fear, as he made all speed toward where Bill was so manfully shrieking for his comrades to rally around him.

Frank had pinned "Hot" Morgan down in such a manner that he was helpless, and the young tough would have received the punishment of his life if Ruel had not interfered by saying:

"He's the only one who hasn't run away, and he stayed only because it was impossible to do anything else. It looks too much like three jumping on one to give him any more, so let the sneak go."

Just for the instant Frank hesitated, and then, rising to his feet, at the same time pulling the frightened lad up, he said to him savagely:

"It wasn't such an easy matter to thump

the dudes, was it? I ought to serve you out in proper shape; but since your friends have taken to their heels you shall go with them. Remember this, however, unless you want me to settle matters with you later: If you or any of your crowd try to make more trouble for us the next dose won't be so slight."

"And you're to bring our boat back before morning, or we'll have you arrested for stealing as soon as word can be sent to the village," Ruel added, as he laid hold of the half-dazed boy to prevent him from running until the warning had been given. "Somebody is bound to come around this way before a great while."

"You shall have the blamed old canoe as soon as we can get her here," Horace Morgan blubbered, and Ruel released his hold.

It is safe to say that "Hot" ran as he never had done before, and the city boys were not yet done with laughing when the sounds of oars told that the vanquished invaders were getting away from the vicinity of Indian Island at their best pace.

As the boys started back toward the camp Ruel suddenly halted.

"Well," he exclaimed, "we don't know

enough to come in when it rains! Why didn't we wait until they had got up near the camp, and then taken their boat!" he cried in a tone of vexation. "It would have been worth a dozen such scares as this has been to have made them prisoners on the island while we went back to the village and gave our fathers a chance to say what should be done to them!"

"Say, that's so. Why didn't we think of it?" Frank added bitterly, but Larry was not of the same opinion.

"It's mighty lucky you didn't think of any such plan, for they'd served us out terrible the next chance they got! Don't get to crowin' so loud, for you'll see 'em back here before to-morrow night, an' they'll bring a gang with 'em that'll make it mighty hot for us!"

CHAPTER V

SUSPENSE

It seemed much as if Larry's fears regarding Leander Leighton and his friends had increased since the city boys gave them a scare, and, possibly, a lesson in the art of minding their own affairs.

Although he knew the mischief-makers were well clear of the island, Larry moved cautiously up the path toward the camp, as if fearing each instant that an attack would be made upon him.

"What's the matter, Larry?" asked Ruel. "Have you an idea that there may be other boys around here who are aching to give the dudes a lesson?"

"I allow that Lander is the only fellow who'd think of playing sich tricks," Larry replied in a half whisper, as if afraid of being overheard.

"Then, what's the matter? You're acting as if you believed the island was fairly alive with boys."

"There's no tellin' what Lander's crowd may do," the lad replied with a long-drawn sigh. "It wouldn't be so dreadful hard for him to sneak 'round the point, an' jump in on us before we could get up to the camp."

Ruel and Frank laughed boisterously at this suggestion, and it was a full minute before the latter could control his mirth sufficiently to say:

"You're giving him credit for being able to move mighty fast, for we know to a certainty that he and his crowd pulled straight away from the island, and the best oarsman in the world couldn't double back in time to overhaul us before we get to the camp. Then, again, and this surely should be sufficient to set your fears at rest, that gang have had a full dose for one night. They won't care to show their noses here within the next twenty-four hours."

"Now don't get to thinkin' anything like that," Larry cried, as if in an agony of terror. "Because you served 'em out so rough they'll be all the more keen to square things. They're certain to come before Elish does."

"I believe Larry is more than half right,"

Ruel said gravely, when his cousin would have indulged in another fit of merriment at the country boy's expense. "We didn't finish the job properly, or they wouldn't be in shape to do much fighting."

"Then you really believe they'll come back within a short time?" Frank asked in surprise.

"It seems reasonable. The evening isn't more than half gone and they can well afford to stay out until midnight in order to pay us off for having interfered with their plans."

"Well then, what are you going to do about it?"

"I believe we should stand guard along the shore, to make certain they can't get on the island without our knowledge."

"How can three of us keep our eyes on the whole shore?" Larry asked sharply, almost angrily, and Ruel replied placidly:

"By walking back and forth within a certain space it should be possible. There won't be any fun in doing sentinel duty all night; but it'll be way ahead of giving them a chance to catch us napping."

By this time the boys had arrived at the camp, and Larry made all haste to get inside

the building, as if believing that it was the only spot on the island where he would be safe from "Lander's gang."

The city boys followed the lad who had been employed to "keep an eye on them," for the very good reason that there was nothing more important to be done just then, and once in the kitchen Larry proceeded to lay out cooked food on the table as if he was in danger of starvation.

"What's all that for?" Frank asked in surprise. "It can't be more than three hours since we had supper!"

"What of that? There's no tellin' when we'll have another chance to fill up, for once Lander gets to ragin' somethin's goin' to be done."

"Your friend Leander is the one who will be done if he does anything more than bring back our boat," Ruel replied grimly, and then he and Frank, although they were not hungry, followed Larry's example, in the way of preparing for the future; but they were not inclined to believe that it consisted solely in eating as much as possible.

"Can you swallow anything more?" Ruel

asked when Larry had, with no slight difficulty, succeeded in forcing down the fifth fat doughnut of his mother's making, and Larry replied with a sigh of regret:

"I wish I could, but them doughnuts are so big that a feller can't get outside of many at a time."

"Then come along, and we'll do what we can to keep your friend Leander from making a landing on this island without our knowledge."

"What're you goin' to do?" Larry asked suspiciously.

"Why, we'll patrol the shore. This island isn't so big but that we three should be able to cover it in good shape," Ruel replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

"So you're still stuck on walkin' all night, eh?" Larry asked in a tone of scorn.

"I can't say I'm stuck on it; but that's what's got to be done, for we aren't willing to give those young toughs a chance to do us any more mischief."

"An' you won't stay here in the camp when we can make a regular fort out of it, and keep 'em outside?"

"It would be a prison, rather than a fort, for if that gang should come and find us shut in, it would be a simple matter to prevent us from getting out."

"Well, I'll stay right here, an' we'll see who'll come through the scrape in the best shape," Larry said with a vain effort at appearing determined, and at the same time glancing furtively at his companions.

"There's nothing to prevent you from pleasing yourself," Ruel replied carelessly. "I reckon Frank and I can stand guard alone; but what if the toughs should come ashore, thus giving us the opportunity to get off in their boat?"

"You wouldn't leave me on the island alone with 'em?" and Larry gave every evidence of alarm.

"What else could we do?" Frank asked. "We should have taken their boat when we had the chance, and it would be hard lines to miss it again, simply because you were shut up here in the camp."

Larry looked from one to the other, as if trying to decide whether they really would go away while he remained much the same as a

prisoner. He must have come to the conclusion that the city boys would not hesitate, if they could really get possession of the enemy's boat, for he said in anything but a cheerful tone:

"Well, if you are bound to walk 'round all night when you could go to bed an' enjoy yourselves, I s'pose I'll have to trail on behind; but all the same it's a big piece of foolishness."

"It may be," Ruel said, with a cheery laugh; "but we've got a different idea in our heads, and you couldn't drive it out by the proposition that we shut ourselves in here, and wait for them."

As he spoke Frank opened the door and Ruel stepped outside, Larry hanging back to ask:

"Are you goin' to lock the camp door?"

"You may if you can; it will keep those fellows out; but you heard Leander say that he knew how to get in through the kitchen window."

"I'll lock the door anyway," Larry replied, and he spent so much time in so doing as to make it appear very plain that he would have

been glad to see the enemy returning while it was yet possible to gain a shelter inside.

The city boys did not wait many seconds for him to fumble with the key, but started off down the path to the shore and, rather than be left alone in the dark, Larry very speedily had the door as securely fastened as was possible with the frail lock.

Not a word did Larry speak as the three walked toward the shore, and, understanding that he was afflicted with a bad case of the sulks, Ruel and Frank made no effort to engage him in conversation.

On arriving at the water's edge Ruel said to his cousin:

"You go in that direction and I will take the opposite course; we'll keep on until we meet; then each can turn and retrace his steps. Of course we must all be keeping our ears as well as our eyes open, and at the first sound of oars we must contrive to come together at this place ——"

"What am I to do?" Larry interrupted. "It's all a crazy piece of business to make so much work for ourselves; but I don't want to be left behind alone."

"Afraid?" Frank asked with a laugh, and Larry replied decidedly:

"Of course I ain't—that is, not while Lander's gang keep at a distance; but I wouldn't want to be by myself if they were on the island."

"You may follow one of us; or, we'll divide the distance into three parts, with you to take one of them. What do you say?" said Ruel, and Larry added:

"I reckon it'll be jest as well if I stay with one of you."

"Very well, we'll begin the tramp, and bear in mind, Larry, that we are to keep mighty still. I don't want those fellows to find out that we're on watch, for if there is a chance of our getting their boat, as well as our own, we mustn't slip up on it."

The city boys began the tramp, going in opposite directions, and Larry kept close at Ruel's heels, complaining now and then when the leaders stopped to peer out over the water.

"What do you expect to see while it's so dark?" he asked irritably, and Ruel said sharply:

"Look here, Larry, I'm not doing this for

fun, but in order to give your friends the lesson that might have been given a short time ago if we hadn't been so stupid. I'm not minded that you should let them know what's going on, as surely will be done unless you hold your tongue. If you can't trail on behind without making any noise, you'd better just stay here by yourself, and that you may depend upon."

This had the effect of reducing Larry to silence, and not another word came from his lips, even when they met Frank after half the distance around the island had been traversed.

Even to the city boys, who were so eager to teach Leander and his followers a needed lesson, it was a dismal time of suspense and labor. It was quite within the bounds of possibility, as both Ruel and Frank understood, for the enemy to make a landing secretly, despite the alertness of the sentinels, and most humiliating would it be to the lads from Philadelphia if they were finally worsted, after having had it in their power to punish the invaders.

A full hour passed without anything be-

tokening the enemy having been seen or heard, and even Ruel was beginning to believe they were foolish to thus exert themselves while Leander and his followers might have gone home like honest boys, when suddenly there came over the water a faint throb-throb-throbbing as of oars.

"They're coming!" Ruel whispered excitedly to Larry. "Suppose you run back to overtake Frank, and bring him here?"

"I'd rather stay where I am," Larry replied tremulously, and it was with difficulty that Ruel repressed an exclamation of anger.

"Then we must take our chances of their going past on either side, and wait till Frank comes up," he said curtly, and during the next five minutes it was as if he could hear the beatings of his own heart, so great was the suspense and anxiety.

Fortunately, however, or so it seemed at the time, Frank had also heard the sound of oars, which momentarily grew louder, and hurried forward at his best pace until he came upon his companions at a point on the shore nearly opposite the place from which the canoe had been stolen.

"It sounds as if they counted on making a landing somewhere near here," he whispered to Ruel. "Shall we let them go past us, as we did before, and then make a dash for their boat?"

"That's the idea. Unless we do something to give an alarm the plan should work as well as when they first came. Get into the bushes as soon as we can say to a certainty where they'll come ashore, and then keep perfectly still until they are so far inland that there'll be no danger of their hearing us when we make a break for the boat."

In a twinkling the lads were among the foliage, where, in the gloom of the night, there was no danger of being seen, and Larry literally burrowed into the moss that he might be screened from view.

Five, ten minutes passed, and then it was possible to distinguish the outlines of the slowly approaching boat. Because of the warm reception accorded them on their previous visit the invaders were more cautious, and used their oars as paddles when near the shore, lest the splashing of the water should be heard.

Ruel gripped his cousin's arm as Leander's party ran the bow of the boat up on the sand within twelve or fifteen yards of where they lay in hiding, and stepped quietly and cautiously ashore.

On this occasion the leader did not take the chances of addressing his followers before leading them on to supposed victory, but, after making certain they were close behind him in single file, started in the direction of the camp.

Ruel counted fifty, in order to have some idea of the passing of time, and then whispered to his companions:

"Now see how softly we can move. Don't speak, but pile aboard that boat and push."

He had not ceased speaking before Larry leaped to his feet, and, without any heed as to silence, ran at full speed toward the shore, making noise enough to have given token of his movements to any one on the island, even though so far away as the camp.

Then came a shrill cry of terror from him, even before Ruel or Frank had had time to give vent to their anger because of his indis-

cretion, and an instant later could be heard the startling information :

"The boat's adrift! She's adrift, and now what'll we do?"

CHAPTER VI

THE PARLEY

NEITHER Ruel nor Frank understood the full meaning of Larry's words when he announced that the boat which they hoped to capture was adrift, leaving Leander and his followers on the island.

At the moment the only thought in the minds of the city boys was that by coming out from the place of concealment with so much noise, and by shouting at the full strength of his lungs, Larry had prevented them from giving the invaders a lesson such as they deserved.

Therefore it was that Ruel and Frank stood like statues near the hiding-place, making no effort to go forward or retreat, so desperately angry because of what they believed simply a display of cowardice, as to be absolutely incapable of speech.

Leander and his following had no such overwhelming cause for anger; but they under-

stood that once more had the dudes proven that they excelled in strategy, and, with the hope that it might yet be possible to avert a disaster, retraced their steps at full speed, arriving at the water's edge only to see their boat being carried rapidly away by the strong night breeze, while Larry Duffield stood gazing helplessly at her.

Leander was not remarkable for his quick wit, or, in other words, he was a dull lad, and instead of understanding how the mishap had occurred, as many another boy in his position would have done, believed that Larry had set the boat adrift as a means of being revenged for the theft of the canoe.

Therefore it was that Leander proceeded at once to deal out justice with a swift and heavy hand.

"Here's the sneak who did it!" Leander cried, leaping upon the unfortunate Larry much as a cat jumps upon a mouse. "Come on, fellers, an' we'll thump the life outer him!"

Larry had no more than time to give vent to a shrill squeal of terror before Leander began to pummel him, and in a twinkling Bill

and Hot were aiding their leader in a most vigorous fashion, Larry screaming with pain and fear.

"It serves him right," Ruel said grimly, "for he spoiled the whole plan, but at the same time we can't stand here and see those fellows pound him. Come on!"

No more than a minute had elapsed from the time Leander struck the first blow, when Ruel and Frank took a decided hand in the affair, and so vigorous was their attack that the invaders were speedily forced to give over the punishment of Larry in order to protect themselves.

"Haven't you got life enough to help yourself?" Frank cried angrily as, when the battle was well on, he saw Larry stand idly by nursing his own bruises while those who had come to his rescue were fighting against odds. "Do something!"

This appeal did not arouse the frightened lad, who stood leaning against a tree as if on the verge of death, when, by prompt action, he might have turned the victory in favor of his own party.

Except for a fortunate accident the city boys

would have been speedily beaten, for they were but two against three. Ruel had but just said to himself that a rapid retreat was necessary in order to save themselves from severe punishment, when Leander, who was opposed to him, stumbled over a fallen tree at the very moment when Bill Dean was rushing forward to get in a heavy blow on the "city dude."

The natural result was that both the young toughs measured their lengths on the ground, one on top of the other, and Ruel had them at his mercy.

"Finish that fellow off in short order!" he cried to Frank. "I've got two of the gang where they can't play any funny tricks."

Hot Morgan, who was but little braver than Larry, took alarm at this announcement, and without waiting to strike another blow fled up the path at full speed.

With the leader of the gang and his lieutenant helpless and howling for mercy, the battle was ended in favor of the "dudes"; but it had been a close shave for the defenders of the island, who surely would have been worsted

save for the accident which virtually put Leander out of the fight.

Ruel and Frank made certain the prisoners could not offer further resistance by pinning them down to the ground, and then it was that the city boys realized they had made another mistake. If, instead of going to Larry's assistance, they had pressed on to seize the drifting boat it might have been possible to get possession of her before she was in deep water.

The battle had been prolonged, however, until the wind had carried her so far from the shore that there was little hope of reaching her even by swimming, and the city visitors, as well as the invaders, were prisoners on the island.

"Even though you didn't dare to defend yourself, you might have gone after the boat when we came up to take your part!" Ruel cried angrily to Larry Duffield. "It's a pity these fellows didn't give you a worse flogging!"

"I'm mighty near killed already!" Larry sobbed. "How could a feller go after the old boat when he's 'bout dead?"

"I notice that you've got life enough left to

make the biggest kind of a noise! Why don't you stop howling like a baby, and do something?"

"I'd like to know what I can do?" Larry wailed. "The whole crowd jumped down on me, an' I couldn't so much as move a finger!"

"Oh, stop that kind of talk," Leander Leighton cried contemptuously, speaking indistinctly because Ruel was pressing his face deep amid the moss and dead leaves. "You wouldn't dare to move a finger if one of us had so much as looked your way! Say, you city fellows, we're willin' to agree that you've got us foul, an' now what're you goin' to do 'bout it? It don't stand to reason you can hold us down here all night."

"I'm trying to think what we had best do," Ruel replied in a thoughtful tone; "but first I'd like to know why you sent your boat adrift when you came ashore? Did you count on staying here a spell with us?"

"We didn't send her adrift," Bill Dean cried angrily. "Hot Morgan was to pull her up, an' he must have forgot about it. Now what are you fellers goin' to do?"

"I don't know," Ruel replied truthfully.

"I did have it in mind that we'd give you fellows the soundest thumping you ever had; but it doesn't seem like the right thing to do now you're helpless. Suppose we let up on you?"

"I can't see that we'd be much better off," Leander said as he finally succeeded in freeing his mouth from leaves. "Here we are on this blessed island, with no chance to get off. It looks as if we'd got ourselves into the worst kind of a hole, 'less there's a show Larry's Elish will come to see how you're gettin' along."

"He agreed not to show up here for a week at the very shortest," Larry wailed. "Of course he believes we've got the canoe, an' there ain't any reason for him to spend time runnin' 'round the lake when the city boarders want so much waitin' on. If somebody'd only find the canoe! Then our folks would know we was in trouble."

"There's mighty little chance for that," Bill Dean said glumly. "We hauled her way up in the bushes on Johnson's Point, an' even if you knew jest where to find her, it would take a mighty long time."

"Well, it seems as if we were fixed here for quite a spell," Ruel said half to himself, as he unconsciously so far raised himself that Leander had no difficulty in wriggling free; but he made no attempt at running away, perhaps for the very good reason that it would have been impossible to go far.

Then it was that Ruel beckoned for his cousin to follow him a short distance among the bushes for a private conversation, and while they were absent the invaders and Larry stared savagely at each other in silence; but no one moved, save as the late prisoners made a slight change of position in order to lessen their bodily discomfort.

When perhaps three minutes had elapsed the city boys came back, and Ruel said, speaking sternly:

"Of course we can't hold you two prisoners, for it may be three or four days before it will be possible to leave the island. The camp is ours, because our fathers hired it, and here we shall live until somebody comes to the rescue. You are to hunt up the other member of the gang, and get along as best you may on the westerly side of the path. If you cross the

line, no matter for what purpose, we'll thump the life out of you."

"But how'll we get anything to eat?"

"That isn't any affair of ours," and now Frank did his share toward settling matters. "We didn't ask you to come here, nor did we set your boat adrift, therefore, it seems to me that you're getting off easily."

Leander and Bill rose to their feet slowly, and Larry, who had not ventured to move from his self-selected station near the tree, exclaimed in alarm:

"Are you city fellers goin' to let them off like this? They won't stay where you've put 'em, any more'n a flea would, an' there'll be terrible times 'round here!"

"You an' Hot Morgan oughter be put inter a bag together an' shook up!" Bill Dean said in a scornful tone. "No matter what kind of times we have 'round here, you two won't be in it, 'cause you're too big cowards to take any chances. If Hot don't wish his cake was dough before I get through with him, it'll be funny, an' you can make certain he'll never let another boat go adrift when he's been told to look out for her!"

Then Master Dean marched off into the bushes, and Leander followed him, Larry crying shrilly as the invaders disappeared from view :

"Now you city fellers have dished everythin', an' that's the fact! You oughter had better sense than to let Lander and them other fellers loose!"

"Considering the fact that all you've done is to howl and run away, I can't see that anything we may decide upon concerns you," Frank replied sharply. "But for being frightened out of all your wits, if you ever had any, I believe you could have got hold of the boat!"

"Don't let's quarrel among ourselves," Ruel cried quickly, before Larry could make reply. "We're in a disagreeable position ; let's stick together. We'll go up to the camp to make certain Leander and his gang don't get more than their share of the provisions."

"More'n their share!" Larry cried as if in a rage. "They haven't got any share, an' shan't have so much as a crumb!"

"Listen to me a minute, Larry, and try to understand what I say, so that we may get

along better in the future. Frank and I will take charge of this business, for you're not to be depended on, and matters will go exactly as we say. I don't feel inclined to feed three boys who have made so much trouble for us; but at the same time I won't sit still and see them suffering from lack of food when we've got plenty."

"But I brought that stuff from home, an' it's mine!"

"I reckon you will find that your parents charged our fathers every cent it was worth, if you come to a question of ownership, so don't put in any especial claim on what is common property. Come on, and try to hold your tongue until we are where it may be possible to talk without being overheard."

Then Ruel led the way at a rapid pace toward the camp, and Larry could do no less than obey, at least so far as to follow the city boys, for he did not dare to loiter lest Leander or one of his friends should pounce upon him.

The three walked rapidly up the path until arriving at the camp, and, greatly to their re-

lief of mind, neither saw nor heard the invaders.

"Now you have a chance of hugging the shanty closely, as was your desire in the first place," Ruel said to Larry as the three entered the building, closing and locking the door behind them, and Larry replied in the tone of one who has been deeply injured:

"If we'd stayed here as I wanted to, we wouldn't be shut up on this island with that gang."

"We should have stood a good chance of being shut up here; but they would be in condition to go or come as they pleased, and I would rather have matters as they are," and Ruel set about examining the fastenings of the windows, giving particular attention to those in the kitchen, where Leander had said it would be an easy matter for him to enter.

"It's a case of standing guard, and Larry must do his share," Ruel said firmly. "He can at least keep his eyes open, and awaken us if any one comes prowling around."

"I wouldn't stand guard alone for a thousand dollars!" Larry cried in an agony of terror, and Ruel added grimly:

"Unless I'm making the biggest kind of a mistake you'll do it without being paid a cent, or take the chances of settling with Frank and me, for the time has come when we can't afford to have any foolishness."

CHAPTER VII

THE WATER SUPPLY

RUEL proposed, and his cousin agreed, that he should stand the first watch, remaining on guard an hour or more, when Frank was to relieve him and Larry come on duty in turn.

This arrangement had hardly more than been decided upon, and Frank was ready to crawl into the narrow bunk, when Ruel made the discovery that there was no water in the camp.

"Whoever is on guard may be thirsty before morning, and it will be better if I get what we may need. Then there will be no reason for awakening all hands when a supply is wanted," Ruel said, as he took up the water can and softly unlocked the door.

The spring was at some distance from the shanty, and further inland. To reach it one had to ascend the slight elevation which marked the middle of the island, through a

dense growth of spruce bushes; but there was a well defined path leading to the place; therefore, even though it was dark, Ruel had no fear of losing his way.

"Shall I lock the door after you have gone out?" Frank asked, and his cousin replied:

"That will be the safest plan, for it is possible Leander and his gang may be sneaking around here in the hope of catching us off our guard, although I'm thinking they've had enough of the 'city dudes' for one night."

Ruel opened the door cautiously, taking due heed to his footsteps as he left the camp. Frank closed the door, then reopened it, and went out. He stood listening for the slightest sound of danger.

"Why don't you shut the door?" Larry asked petulantly from the bunk, for he had lost no time in crawling into bed after Ruel announced to the others his plans for guarding the camp.

"It won't do you a little bit of harm to get a whiff of fresh air," Frank said with a laugh. "If we were alone on the island we should certainly have everything wide open so the wind could blow through the shanty. It's a

shame to shut ourselves in so closely on a night like this."

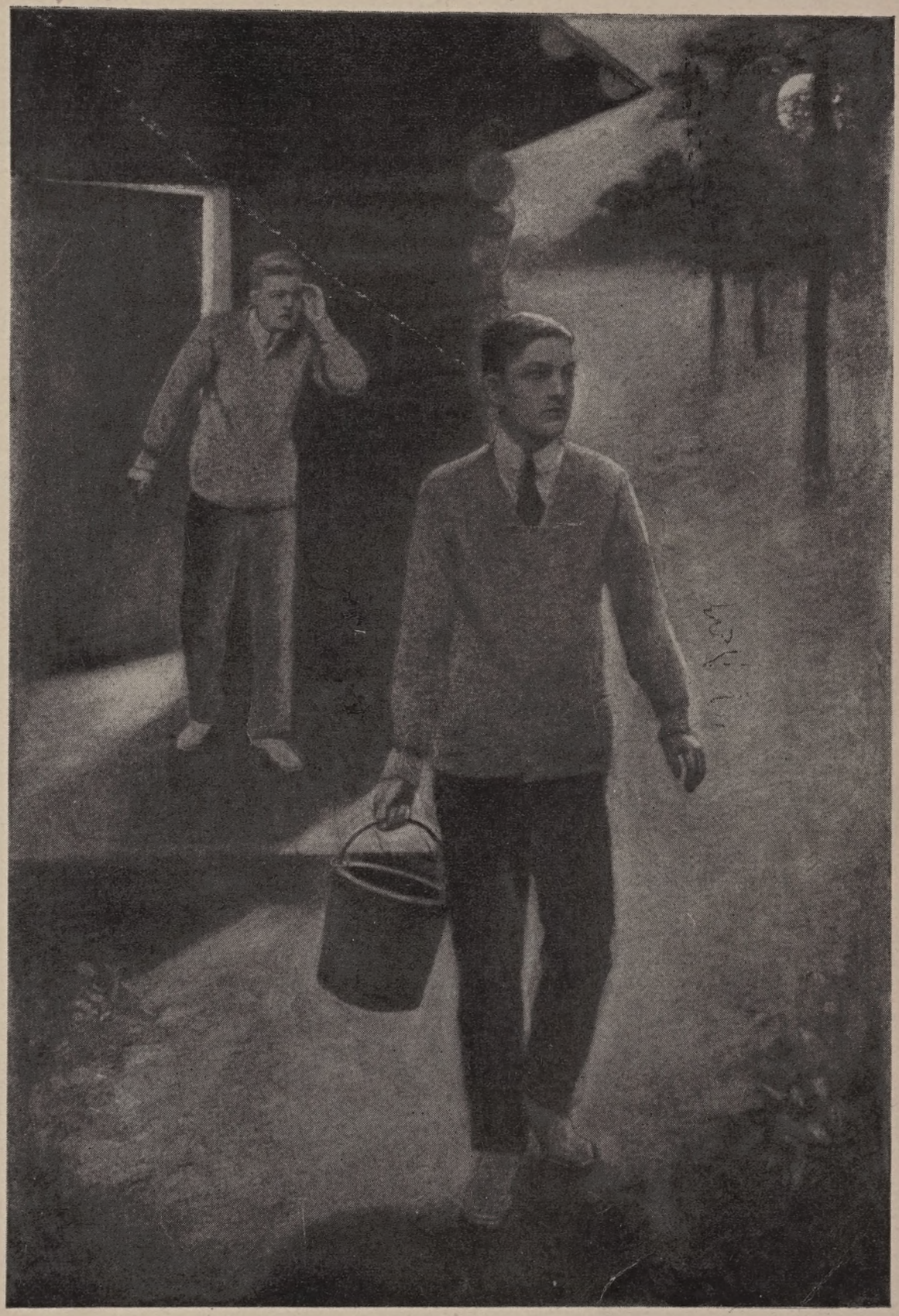
"But we ain't alone, an' you've got to keep everything locked snug, so what's the sense of moonin' 'round when other folks wanter go to sleep?"

"What's the need of being frightened almost to death just because Leander and his friends have tried to make matters uncomfortable for us? This is the first time I ever lived in a camp, and I'm going to make the most of it, no matter how many country toughs are hanging around here to make trouble."

"You'll stand there talkin' till they find out that the door is open, an' come in with a rush when there's no chance of our stoppin' 'em."

"Suppose they should come? You and I ought to be able to hold the place. You have allowed that this would be a regular fort, and now is a good time ——"

Frank ceased speaking very suddenly, for at that instant he heard the sound of voices in the distance, and knew beyond question that his cousin had come across the enemy.



"WHAT'S THE NEED OF BEING FRIGHTENED?"

"They have found out that Ruel is alone," he exclaimed. "Look after the camp!"

Even while speaking Frank had started at full speed up the path leading to the spring, and the banging of the door an instant later told that Larry was insuring the safety of the camp by shutting himself inside, regardless of whatever misfortunes might come to his companions.

Frank made such good use of his legs that he came up with his cousin before the latter had discovered the whereabouts of the enemy, but was moving forward cautiously to get a glimpse of those who had evidently taken up their station near the spring.

"What's the matter? I thought I heard you talking with some one?"

"So you did," and Ruel spoke as if he was amused rather than alarmed. "Some one—I fancy it was the valiant Leander—just called out that I'm to keep my distance from the spring, and I count on learning what he means."

"Come any nearer an' you won't be long in findin' out more'n will be funny!" a voice from amid the bushes cried threateningly.

"You dudes don't want to think that jest 'cause you got the best of us a spell ago, you can run everything around here."

"Be careful!" Frank whispered warningly. "They are likely waiting for a chance to jump you!"

"They've tried that twice without getting very much sport out of it," Ruel said grimly. "What I want to know is, why they're staying under cover, warning us to keep our distance."

"We don't allow that you can come anywhere nigh this spring!" a threatening voice cried, and the city lads knew that Leander was the speaker. "I s'pose you thought we'd have to come down on our marrow bones an' beg for somethin' to eat; but after you've had time to get good an' thirsty, you'll find out that somebody else has got to do the beggin'."

"What do you mean?" Ruel cried irritably. "Why don't you come out like men, and give the snap away, if you've got one?"

"I'm allowin' you'll soon see that we've got a mighty good one. We're holdin' the spring, an' not a drop of water will you get

till after comin' to our terms. I ain't crazy enough to think that you'll give it right away; but wait till noon to-morrow, an' then we'll hear you talk."

"What is it you want?" Frank asked, for now curiosity, rather than fear, was aroused.

"Half of all the grub you've got. It may be we'll have to stay here quite a spell, an' we don't count on goin' hungry."

"You must be bigger idiots than I allowed, if you think we intended to starve you out!" Ruel cried with a laugh. "It will go considerably against the grain to feed you, but we counted on being at least half-way decent."

"Givin' in already, eh?" Leander cried in a scornful tone. "I reckoned you'd come to it at last; but didn't s'pose you'd get on your knees so quick ——"

"Don't make the mistake of thinking that we're on our knees!" and now Ruel gave signs of being angry. "It hadn't come into our minds that you were to be starved into being decent fellows; but since you have taken so much trouble to prove you're meaner than we reckoned on, the game shall be played out. Keep the spring, if that is

your game, and we'll hold the food. A fellow needn't guess very hard to decide who'll give in first."

"We've got the chance to catch fish, so I reckon we won't come so very near starvin' to death; but you'll be mighty thirsty 'twixt now an' to-morrow night," Leander cried in a triumphant tone, and Ruel replied with a hearty laugh:

"Are you counting on carrying the whole lake up here? If you don't, it won't be any very great hardship for us to get our supply of water from the shore, although it may be a bit warm."

It was evident that the valiant Leander had, for the time being, forgotten that the water of the lake would serve to quench thirst, for neither he nor his comrades spoke during a full minute, and then the leader said threateningly:

"We'll soon see whether you can leave that camp of yours! I did allow that you might walk around a little, so's not to get all cramped up in that shanty; but now the first one who comes outside the door will get it quick an' hot!"

"This is a good chance to give us the biggest dose you can, for we're outside, and we'll stay till you have learned how much can be done. Only you are to remember this: the next time we have a tussle you fellows won't be let off so easily. So far we've tried to be decent; but from now on—look out!" and Ruel spoke as if it would delight him to have the leader of the gang completely in his power once more.

"You talk big, but we'll see what you can do," Leander replied with a scornful laugh, and Frank, irritated beyond the possibility of holding his tongue in check, cried angrily:

"You've had two chances of seeing that much, and know that we might have pounded the life out of you, but let up because of not being willing to hit a fellow when he was down!"

"The next time things will be different," Leander replied with a laugh, evidently well pleased because he had succeeded in angering the others.

"We are showing ourselves foolish by staying here to swap threats," Ruel whispered, seizing his cousin by the arm and literally

forcing him back through the bushes. "We'd be running too great a risk to make any effort at gaining the spring while it is dark, and, besides, there can't be so much difference between the water from there and the lake."

"I thought it wouldn't take sich a very great while to make you understand that we'd got you under our thumb!" Leander cried jeeringly as he heard the city boys retreating. "Now don't you go to the shore for water, or we'll thump you into a reg'lar jelly!"

Frank would have made an intemperate reply, but that Ruel pressed his hand firmly over the mouth of his cousin, as he whispered:

"It is giving them too much pleasure for us to lose our temper. Come back to the camp, and we'll decide upon what's to be done."

"Are we to let them crow over us?" Frank asked angrily as soon as it was possible for him to speak.

"What harm will it do? Better that than take the chances of being beaten here in the

dark. When next we come face to face with that gang we must have the best of the encounter, or give up all hope of holding our own."

"I'm beginning to fancy that they are the stronger, for we can't count on Larry's raising a hand even in his own defense; therefore, it will be three to two."

"Surely you don't reckon Hot Morgan in as one! He hasn't shown himself much better than Larry; therefore, as I figure it, we are about evenly matched, if we are careful not to give them an advantage."

"I allowed it wouldn't take much to scare you dudes away!" Leander cried from his hiding-place. "When you're ready to divide things up 'cordin' to what I think is right, jest poke your head outer the camp door an' yell. We'll be close 'round there from this out!"

The city boys made no reply, for by this time Frank had his temper under better control, and a moment later they were pounding for admittance on the barred door of the shanty.

"Are you alone?" Larry cried from the

inside, but without making any effort to open the door.

"What difference does that make, since we want to come in?" and now it was Ruel who had lost his temper. "A fine coward you are, to keep the door closed when we might be needing to get inside in a hurry! Unlock it, or I'll find out how strong the hinges may be."

Larry did not dare delay any longer, but turned the key in the lock, and immediately fled to the kitchen, as if fancying the enemy might be entering close at the heels of the city boys.

"Now you're to listen to what I've got to say, Larry Duffield. If you don't show more backbone I'll call on Leander and his friends to take you off our hands, and I fancy they wouldn't be backward about taking advantage of the opportunity. We're here on the island with three young toughs, and unless each of us stands up like a man against them we'll be in a mighty fine mess."

Larry made no reply to this but, seeing the empty can on the floor where Ruel had dropped it, he asked whiningly:

"Why didn't you get the water?"

"Because Leander says we shan't have any, and unless you want to know what thirst is like you'd better try to forget you're a coward."

Larry gave no attention whatsoever to the latter portion of this rather disagreeable remark, but insisted on knowing what had happened while he remained locked in the camp, and when Frank gave him a general idea of the conversation with Leander, terror seized upon him once more.

"The only way is to make the best kind of a trade you can," he cried. "Lander'll do jest what he threatens, an' it'll only be makin' things worse for us if we hold out against them!"

"So far, I can't see that he has come very near carrying out his threats, and it may be that we can make matters for him as lively as they have been," Ruel replied with a laugh.

"You didn't get the water, I notice!" Larry cried, as if his was the triumph because of that fact.

"We didn't, for there wasn't any need of a row in the dark. We'll quench our thirst to-

night with water from the lake, for there's plenty of it."

"Didn't he tell you not to go there?"

"Yes, but we are going just the same. He won't have us at such a disadvantage on the shore as would have been the case in the bushes, and we'll let him understand how much we care for his threats."

"Do you reckon I'm going with you?" Larry exclaimed.

"So far as we are concerned it will be better if you stay here, but in case you lock the door against us so that we can't get inside quickly, if we have to, I'll give over paying any attention to Leander, and make it my business to set you straight."

"But how can ——"

"We won't have any argument over the matter, Larry," Ruel continued sharply. "You've got to turn over a new leaf in some way, or Frank and I will put you out-of-doors to prevent your doing us any serious mischief. And you know what will happen to you if Leander catches you alone."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIEGE

LARRY DUFFIELD was so frightened because of what it might be possible for "Lander's gang" to do that he gave no attention to the threats his companions had made. He felt positive the invaders could work any kind of mischief on which they might set their minds, and seemingly failed to hear what was said regarding his own cowardice.

"It's no use trying to beat any sense into him," Ruel said after a time. "I have heard of people being scared out of their wits, but never before saw a case of the kind. Larry really doesn't know what he's about, and it's only a waste of time to either coax or threaten."

"I know enough not to try any funny business with Lander's gang, for they jest about boss this town. If you fellers want the life thumped clean outer you, go ahead an' run things same's you've started; but you can't pull me into the game."

"If you believe that Leander will feel any better disposed toward you because of not bearing a hand with us, you're greatly mistaken," Frank said laughingly. "He'll serve you out the same, in case he gets the chance, if you refuse to stand up for yourself, as if you did your level best to down him. Your safest plan is to join us at once in worsting him."

"You can't do anything of the kind!" said Larry. "I've seen bigger fellers than you try that game, an' get the worst of it."

"Let him alone, Frank," Ruel said impatiently. "The question is whether we'd best start for the shore now to get water or wait until daylight, when we can see what those toughs are about?"

"I believe in getting what we need now, if for no other reason than to show the gang that we're ready to meet them when we stand half a chance of knowing what's going on. It's bright moonlight, and they can't sneak up on us without being seen."

Instead of replying, Ruel went into the kitchen, where they had left the clubs Larry had prepared as weapons for the first en-

counter, and, giving one of these to his cousin, said grimly :

" We'd better take both the cans in order to bring up water enough to last until after breakfast. It would be foolish for us to be tender in handling that gang. If they make an attack let them have it with the clubs, for those fellows need more than an ordinary flogging to teach them a lesson."

Frank took the weapon, and the second tin can, saying as he turned to follow his cousin, who was already in the open air :

" See here, Larry, if it will make you feel more safe, lock the door ; but take mighty good care you stand by to open it quickly if we come back in a hurry, or I'll make it my especial duty to serve you out worse than Leander Leighton ever dreamed of doing. It isn't impossible we may have to take to our heels, in which case there can be no loitering when we get back here again."

" Lander is sure to serve you out somethin' terrible," Larry gasped.

" We're talking about your standing ready to open the door when we get back, and not of what that bully may do. The question is

whether we can trust you to let us in without too many words?"

"Of course I'll let you in," Larry replied, nervously, fingering the key as if impatient for Frank to be gone. "You can't expect that I'll keep the door open while they're prowlin' 'round."

"Come on, Frank!" Ruel cried, speaking loudly as if hoping the enemy might hear. "I don't want to waste time over a little job like this, for I count on getting some sleep before morning!"

Larry shut the door with a bang before the city boys had well started toward the shore and Frank laughed heartily as he heard the click of the key in the lock.

"He doesn't understand that a fellow could kick that door into splinters without trying very hard, but seems to think he's safe when the flimsy thing is fastened," he said, keeping close to his cousin's side for battle in case an attack was made.

"We won't pay any attention to what he says from this on," Ruel replied, "though it is a pity he couldn't have the chance to find out how that precious gang would treat him

if he gave himself up, as he seems inclined to do. Now, if they try to kick up a row we must give them a full dose, if possible," he added in a low tone. "It was a mistake to let them off easily when we had them in our power."

He had hardly ceased speaking when a big rock came hurtling through the air within a few inches of his head, causing both lads to stop suddenly, as they turned to resist an attack.

Nothing could be seen of the enemy, but within the next twenty seconds four missiles came in the wake of the first, and but for the fact that it was sufficiently light to enable them to dodge the rocks one or both might have been seriously injured.

"You cowards!" Ruel cried angrily, "why don't you come out like decent fellows, instead of skulking like sneaks?"

"'Cause we don't have to," Leander replied mockingly. "All we're after is to see that you don't get any water, an' I'm allowin' it won't be much of a job to do that."

"Our turn will come!" Frank shouted in a rage, "and when it does you won't get off so easily as before!"

"We ain't worrying very much 'bout what may happen," Bill Dean shouted derisively, "'cause we've got the upper hand of you, an' count on keepin' it till you knuckle down an' pass over half the grub."

"It would have been a case of sharing all we had, rather than know you were hungry," Ruel replied, striving hard to keep his temper within bounds, "if you had acted like half-way respectable fellows; but since you've taken it into your heads to threaten before waiting to learn what we proposed to do, we'll hold what we've got."

"An' we count on doin' the same!" Leander cried, "so keep away from the shore till you're ready to come to our terms."

"We'll do as we please, and it will be the worse for you if any move is made to stop us!" Frank retorted. "We shan't be too careful how we handle a gang of pirates like you, so don't come too near."

"Don't waste any more breath on them," Ruel whispered as he pulled his cousin into the bushes on the northerly side of the path, where they would be hidden from view. "We'll make a quick run while they can't see

us, and have the cans filled before they know what we're about."

Then, without waiting for a reply, he led the way at a run through the thick foliage, and in a few moments the two were on the shore filling the cans.

"Now we'll go to the camp along the path on the other side, where the boat was hauled up, and I'm out of my reckoning if we don't get there without being seen."

"But that won't be enough to satisfy me," Frank replied as he followed his cousin, who had started around the shore immediately after outlining the plan. "Now is the time when we must show them that we won't stand any more nonsense."

"That can be done after we've carried the water into the camp," Ruel said without slackening pace, and not until they were in front of the shanty door, having made a full half-circuit of the island, did he halt.

This time Larry opened the door promptly, asking in a voice tremulous with fear:

"How did you give 'em the slip? I heard Lander tellin' what he'd do, an' counted for certain that they'd down you."

"That Leander of yours isn't more than half as wise as he fancies. It isn't much of a trick to do him up, as he'll find out in a few minutes."

"But surely you ain't goin' back after we've got enough to drink!" Larry said imploringly. "What's the use of kickin' up a row when there's no need of it?"

"There is need," Frank replied irritably. "We're going to show those fellows that we don't intend to stand any more nonsense, and it won't be a very long job."

Frank was already in the act of opening the door when he ceased speaking; but before he could step outside, Ruel pulled him back as he said in a low tone:

"There's no good reason why we should lose any advantage that has been gained. Those chumps think we're sulking around in the bushes somewhere, trying to get back the same way we came, and it won't be a bad idea to let them remain of the same mind until we've had a chance to get in a bit of work."

Then Ruel led the way to a small window on the opposite side of the kitchen,

which was screened by a reasonably heavy shutter, and this he hurriedly began to unfasten.

"You mustn't do that!" Larry cried, all his fears returning.

"Why not?"

"'Cause them fellers can come right through if that is open!"

"I reckon it won't be any very heavy job for you to bolt it again after we're outside." Ruel threw open the shutter and began to clamber through the opening.

Frank was close upon his heels, realizing in an instant how great might be the advantage of such a course, and Larry danced about on his toes in an agony of terror lest "Lander's gang" should come before he could close the window again.

The city boys took the clubs with them, and when they had reached the bushes which grew close by this side of the shanty, Ruel said in a whisper:

"If we can manage to come upon those fellows suddenly and find them among the trees these clubs won't be of very much service. In that case, don't try to use yours, but throw

it away and strike out with your fists, trying to do the most damage you can in the shortest time. It won't pay us to start a regular row; all we want is to show the countrymen what can be done on the jump."

"Go ahead; I'll keep along close at your heels."

Then Ruel led the way, moving cautiously through the foliage lest the noise of their advance give the enemy warning.

During five minutes or more nothing could be seen or heard of those who were surely in need of a severe lesson and then, without warning, the city boys saw before them, cowering behind the trunk of a pine tree, Hot Morgan, who evidently believed he was securely hidden from view.

Without stopping to think that it would not be wise to hamper themselves with a prisoner, Frank leaped upon the back of the coward, at the same time deftly covering the fellow's mouth with his hand.

"Hot" was so terrified at thus finding himself in the hands of the "dudes" that he made no attempt to give an alarm, but lay passive beneath the weight of Frank's body as if hop-

ing by such show of surrender to save himself from punishment.

"Now we have made a mess of it!" Ruel whispered irritably. "We've got to hold this fellow, I suppose, for if we let him go he will give the alarm and there'll be no chance of surprising the others of the gang. It's too bad, for we had a good show of getting the best of them."

"I didn't think of anything but tackling him," Frank replied apologetically. "What shall we do about it?"

"Carry him back to the shanty, of course, though I can't see that we'll be very much better off by holding him prisoner, for he's got about the same amount of courage as Larry. Hurry!"

Frank pulled Hot to his feet with no gentle force, whispering as he did so:

"You're to come with us, and kindly bear in mind that if you try to give an alarm to the remainder of the gang I'll treat you to a flogging such as won't be forgotten this season, and do it even if your chums are standing close by!"

"I won't even so much as yip," Hot said

tremulously. "You mustn't blame me for what the other fellers did, 'cause I haven't tried to play any funny business."

"You haven't because you didn't dare to," was the scornful reply, as Frank pushed the prisoner on in front of him.

Hot was so thoroughly frightened that it is quite possible he would have gone alone to the camp, and the city boys with their prisoner made all haste through the shrubbery, arriving at the camp just as an outcry from the shore told that Leander and his comrade had discovered that again they had been outwitted.

"Open the door, Larry, and be quick about it!" Ruel cried, and much to his surprise Larry obeyed on the instant; but he staggered back in terror on seeing Hot Morgan enter in advance of the others.

"Don't be afraid," Frank cried ironically. "We have brought you company, and you two should agree remarkably well, in view of the fact that you are well mated, so far as backbone goes."

While one might have counted twenty Larry Duffield stood motionless, gazing in mingled

surprise and alarm at the prisoner, and then, understanding what had happened, he leaped upon Hot.

"Stop that!" Ruel cried sternly, as he seized Larry by the shoulder, forcing him backward. "You didn't dare to come out when there was a good chance of meeting this fellow in a fair fight, and you shan't lay hands on him now when he is a prisoner."

CHAPTER IX

THE PRISONER

LARRY was exceedingly brave now that there was apparently no danger threatening. He danced around the prisoner much as a young rooster does around a chicken whom he believes he can whip.

Meanwhile Hot Morgan, not having much faith in the pledges made by his captors, for he believed they might be as untruthful as himself, was in a state of abject fear, remembering, no doubt, the many times when he had badgered, or even ill-treated, Larry, while Leander and Bill stood near at hand to aid if it should become necessary.

Bitter though the city boys were against those who had caused them so much trouble, neither was willing that the prisoner should be subjected to disagreeable treatment, even though not a blow had been struck, and Ruel said decisively:

"We'll have a fair understanding about this thing, Larry, and if you should so far forget

yourself as to break over the rules I am going to make, both Frank and I will see to it that you receive a worse punishment than any you could give Hot Morgan. He's a prisoner, and, therefore, entitled to fair usage; keep your hands off him. Don't venture to threaten what you wouldn't dare to perform if you and he were alone in the camp, but behave yourself. We've got too much in the way of trouble just now, without wasting very many minutes on you, therefore, if you go contrary to orders it will be a blow instead of a word that will call you to your senses. Now then, Frank, what are you going to do with the beggar?"

"Tie him up somewhere, I suppose. It won't do to let him run loose in the camp."

"You needn't tie me," Hot said implor-ingly. "I give you my word that I won't try to run away."

"After all we have heard and seen of your gang, we're not inclined to put very much faith in your word, neither do we intend to spend a great deal of time watching you," Ruel said sharply. "You will be tied here, and later we'll make up our minds as to what shall be done."

Hot looked first at one and then the other; but did not venture to speak, and Frank set about looking for something which would serve in the place of regular fetters.

After much searching he succeeded in finding a short length of rope, which had been used to secure some of the baggage, and a leather belt.

With the belt Horace Morgan's arms were fastened close by his side just above the elbows, and attached to this, at the prisoner's back, was one end of the rope, the other being made fast to the upright which formed the end of the bunks.

This method of fettering was such that the prisoner could sit on the floor, and turn half around in either direction, but without being able to free himself.

When all this had been done, and Larry forced to retire to his bunk, Ruel said to his cousin:

"There is no reason why we shouldn't get some sleep, and I am going to turn in."

"What!" Larry cried in mingled surprise and anger. "Are you goin' to sleep when there's no tellin' but that Lander an' Bill will come here any minute?"

"That is what we are going to do," Ruel replied with a laugh, and Frank, as if to prove his cousin's statement, clambered into the bunk, but without removing very much of his clothing.

"But s'pose them fellers come?" Larry continued.

"Well, suppose they do?"

"Somebody has got to stay awake so's to see to things, else they might jump right in on us."

"You shall attend to that portion of the business, Larry," Ruel replied, as he in turn lay down to sleep. "I can't see that you have done very much to-day, either in the way of working, or guarding against your friend Leander and his gang, so there's no reason why you shouldn't stand watch."

"But I can't do it alone!"

"You surely won't have any one to help you, for Frank and I count on getting a little rest before morning."

"An' them fellers will be certain to come here now you've captured Hot!"

"Very well, if they do you can bristle up in the same fashion as when we brought the

prisoner in, and that ought to frighten them," Frank replied with a sleepy laugh, and then refused to make any reply to Larry's pleadings and questioning.

Whether or not Larry stood watch on that night, neither of the city boys could have told. Confident that Leander and Bill would not make any very desperate attack upon the shanty, they slept peacefully until the morning sun, streaming in through the uncurtained window, awakened them.

Larry was slumbering noisily. The prisoner, seated on the floor with his back against the bunks, was apparently unconscious of his surroundings, and no sound from the outside betokened the whereabouts of the enemy.

In a few seconds all the inmates of the camp were awake, and, save in the case of the prisoner, astir.

Larry was called upon to act as cook, according to the agreement made before leaving the boarding-house, and he set about his duties by making coffee. Now that the sun had risen he presented a very good imitation of a fairly brave boy, and spoke of what he in-

tended to do by way of making reprisals in case Leander and Bill Dean became too troublesome. Indeed, he carried his alleged bravery so far as to insist that while he remained in camp Hot Morgan should not be given a single mouthful of food, and it was upon this point that he and the city boys had a heated discussion, which was ended by Ruel's saying firmly:

"There's no sense in your swaggering around in this fashion, Larry, after showing yourself such a coward yesterday. We told you then, and meant it, that Frank and I counted on attending to the business ourselves, and so we shall. The prisoner is to have his fair proportion of food, and the less you say about it just now the better."

Larry did not reply, save by a sulky demeanor which was increased very perceptibly when Frank, who had partaken of no food himself, gave to Hot Morgan what was a most generous allowance, considering the fact that it might be several days before the larder was replenished.

The city boys did not waste any time over the meal; they had no plan in mind, but yet

it seemed necessary some move be made, and when they had swallowed the last mouthful of the not very appetizing coffee, Ruel said to his cousin :

" We'll go out and see what Leander and his chum are doing."

" Do you think it is safe to leave the prisoner here, now that Larry has grown so bloodthirsty ? "

" It is safe enough, unless Larry wants to try conclusions with us, as he surely will if he meddles in any way with young Morgan. As I said last night, we shan't have any talk with him after having seen of how little value he can be in a time like this ; but in case he attempts to interfere with us in any way, or does that which we have said must not be done, I shall serve him out as I would Leander, for then he will have proven himself an enemy."

Having said this, Ruel took from his belongings a towel and cake of toilet soap, Frank following his example, and saying laughingly to Larry :

" If your friend Leander calls, you can say that Ruel and I have gone down to the shore

to make a second toilet, and, if agreeable, you may keep him here until we get back."

But for the fact that he was indulging in a fit of the sulks, Larry would have made some protest against their venturing out while the enemy might be near at hand. As it was, however, he held his peace, and the two lads stepped into the open air with as little caution regarding their safety as if the island had no other occupants than themselves.

They were on the alert, however, despite this seeming carelessness, but neither believed there was any probability Larry and his comrade would make an attack in open day, when they could be seen, save while in the denser underbrush, a long distance away.

The two lads walked slowly, searching with their eyes on every side for some signs of the enemy; but none were to be seen even after they had arrived at the shore, and this fact caused them no little uneasiness of mind, for it was only reasonable to suppose that the young roughs, who were so eager a few hours previous to make an attack, would be on the watch for their appearance as soon as day dawned.

"Do you suppose they were frightened on finding that we had taken Hot Morgan prisoner?" Frank asked, and Ruel replied with a laugh:

"It is in my mind that we did the one thing which pleased them, when we took that coward in charge. He could be of no assistance in carrying out their plans, and might have been considerably in the way if we had not been so foolish as to capture the young scoundrel. Now we must feed him, and, what is more, have no little trouble in preventing Larry from paying off old scores at Morgan's expense."

"But what has become of Leander and Bill?" Frank asked irritably, not disposed to talk about the prisoner, for whose taking he was responsible, just then.

"Oh, they're around here somewhere, keeping us in sight while they remain hidden," Ruel said carelessly. "Most likely they'll grow bolder as night comes, and perhaps this evening we shall have something of a mix-up."

Then the boys washed their faces and hands, not daring to take a full bath because

of the possibility that the enemy might come, and when they were thus refreshed, Frank, whose mind was ill at ease regarding the whereabouts of Leander and Bill, proposed that they make a complete circuit of the island.

"There is no reason why we should hurry back to the camp for the sake of sitting there with Larry and young Morgan, and I'm eager to learn what Leander is doing, for it seems as if he would have shown himself before this unless there's something afoot."

"I don't understand what he could do, except to make an attack upon us; but if your curiosity is excited we'll have a look around."

The two set off along the shore, going over the same route as that taken the night previous when they had so successfully eluded Leander and Bill, and nothing unusual was seen until they arrived within a few hundred yards of the place from which the canoe had been stolen.

There, while they were yet screened from view by the bushes, it was possible to hear the hum of voices, and Ruel, understanding

that Leander and Bill must be near at hand, motioned for Frank to follow cautiously as he crept slowly through the underbrush until it was possible to have a view of shore.

During the full half minute the city boys gazed in bewilderment at the scene before them. Leander and Bill were engaged in dragging dead trees and half-decayed logs from the thicket, and working so energetically as to make it evident that they were occupied with some serious task; but what it might be, the lads could not understand for several seconds.

Then Ruel whispered to his cousin:

"They are building a raft, and count on paddling across the lake, which is exactly what we should have done."

"But those rotten logs will sink, and they can't find fallen trees enough to make any kind of a raft," Frank replied, and added an instant later as a happy thought occurred to him, "We've got a good chance to go into the business of raft building, for we have an ax, even though it isn't so very sharp. With it we should be able to hew timber enough in a couple of days."

"The question is whether we shall let them keep on with their work?" Ruel said. "I don't know what reason we have for keeping them here, and yet it goes against the grain to let them slip off after all that has been done, leaving us prisoners."

"We can't hope to build a raft while they are here, so the sooner they are away the better, as I look at it," Frank replied, and this view of the situation struck Ruel favorably.

"Of course they don't suspect we know anything about what is going on, and there is no reason for showing ourselves. Let's hang on here until we are tired of watching, and then sneak back to see how Larry and the prisoner are getting along."

CHAPTER X

THE RAID

LEANDER and Bill had not made much progress in the work of raft building when the city boys got the first inkling of what they were about.

Three half-decayed tree trunks were afloat within five or six feet of the shore, moored by several lengths of creeping vines, and there could be no question but that these would sink within the next twenty-four hours, for by that time they would have absorbed sufficient water to send them to the bottom like so many pieces of iron.

"They must work mighty fast if they count on going very far on a raft built of that material," Ruel whispered to his cousin. Even though it might be of great advantage, if the country boys could make their escape, it would have pleased him right well to see the plan fail. "Those logs won't float but a few hours, and I doubt if they can get together enough of such stuff to keep them on the sur-

face half-way from here over to the other shore."

"Do you suppose they'll be so foolish as to make the venture?" Frank asked in surprise, as he noted the fact that already were the spongy logs settling very decidedly in the water.

"That's what we'll soon find out. They must work mighty fast in order to get the tree trunks that may be needed into the lake before the first go to the bottom."

Having thus come to understand that the scheme must be a failure or prove a disaster in case the raft could be put together quickly enough, the city boys became so deeply interested in the proceedings as to forget, for the time being, Larry and the prisoner.

Leander and Bill worked industriously dragging logs out from amid the underbrush during the next five minutes, and then the former said something to his comrade in a tone so low that it was impossible for the listeners to catch the meaning.

On the instant the two ceased their fatiguing labor to plunge amid the underbrush in a direction opposite to where the city boys were

screened from view, and as they disappeared Frank asked in a tone of perplexity :

"Now what do you suppose has sent them off in such a hurry ?"

"Perhaps Leander suddenly remembered where there was better timber, and they have gone for it," Ruel replied carelessly. "We haven't anything better to do, so there's no reason why we shouldn't wait here till we know what they are about."

Frank had no desire to return to the camp, and he was curious to see how the country boys succeeded in their raft building, therefore he settled down on the moss in a comfortable position, well content to remain in hiding for so long a time as should please his cousin.

Five, ten minutes passed, and the others had not returned. No sound came from the thicket to betoken their whereabouts, and Ruel said in a cautious tone, as he stood erect the better to peer down at the logs Leander and Bill had already launched :

"Perhaps they have gone somewhere else to build a raft. I'm not certain we are wise to stay here so long."

"There's nothing to prevent our following

them. They are so puffed up with the idea of giving us the slip that we can keep at their heels without much fear of being discovered, so long as we stay out of sight."

"Come on, then; we'll do our best not to make a noise, and move slowly."

Then Ruel made his way along the shore with the utmost caution, taking the same course as that pursued by Leander and Bill when they set off so suddenly, with Frank following closely at his heels, as a matter of course.

During ten minutes or more they continued the advance without speaking, and making but little noise while moving through the foliage; but nothing had been seen or heard of the enemy.

"Look here, we have surely circled half-way around the island," Ruel said, as he halted and wiped the perspiration from his face. "They must have gone straight across, and we had better do the same thing, for it isn't anything like fun to creep through these bushes, while I'm sure it is hot enough to roast an ox."

"But they surely started around the shore,"

Frank replied with an air of perplexity. "If they had counted on going straight across, it would have been more simple to follow the path."

"Well, they are not on this side of the island near the shore."

"I'm certain they wouldn't have given up the idea of building a raft so soon, therefore we are sure to come upon them by going ahead."

Ruel set off once more, and not another word was spoken until the lads had arrived at the place where the raft building had been begun.

"They must have begun to understand that these rotten logs wouldn't float, and gone back to their camping place, wherever that may be," and Frank gazed at the half-decayed tree trunks, which by this time were nearly submerged, as if believing that through them he might learn why the enemy had, without apparent cause, given over their plan.

At that instant a very disagreeable thought came into Ruel's mind, and he cried in a tone of dismay:

"Say, aren't we dummies? The chances

are that those fellows got a glimpse of us, and took advantage of the opportunity to pay a visit to the camp! If that is the case we're the ones who stand a show of being hungry before any person comes to take us off!"

This suggestion was sufficient to alarm Frank. Now he remembered that Leander had spoken in a cautious tone to Bill Dean, which would not have been necessary had they believed themselves alone on that part of the island.

"Come on!" he said, sharply. "You've guessed the whole business, and while we were creeping through the bushes, nearly roasted to death, those fellows may have turned the camp inside out, for Larry is such a coward that he'd never dare to raise a hand in his own defense. Come on!"

"There's no need of being in such a wonderful hurry," Ruel replied with irritating calmness. "What mischief they wanted to do has already been done, for we have given them a full hour in which to do it."

Then Ruel led the way up the path, Frank reproaching himself sorely because of stupidity.

"We might have known that something was in the wind when they stopped talking sufficiently loud for us to hear!" he cried, angrily. "I had begun to think that we were showing ourselves more than a match for the country toughs; but even Larry couldn't have proven himself a bigger idiot!"

"There's no good in scolding," Ruel said with a laugh. "I'm ready to admit that we're only about a quarter part as keen as boys should be; but that won't mend matters a little bit."

Then, almost unconsciously, Ruel quickened his steps until it was an open question whether he walked or ran, and in a few moments the two had come within view of the shanty.

That Leander and Bill had visited the place there could be no question, for the door was standing open, which would not have been the case if Larry had still been in charge, and Frank said with a laugh that had in it very little of mirth:

"It is almost worth the price we shall have to pay to know that our brave Larry is prisoner to those of whom he stood in such fear.

Now he will come to learn of how much advantage it was to refrain from doing Leander's gang any harm. I'm thinking Hot Morgan has already given him a taste of what he would have suffered ——"

Frank ceased speaking very suddenly. He had come so near the open door as to have a full view of the interior, and there, tied side by side with Hot Morgan to the bunks, was Larry Duffield.

Neither he nor Hot made any outcry, for they had been gagged in the most approved dime-novel fashion, with the sleeves of their own coats, and two more disconsolate-looking lads it would be hard to find in a day's journey.

"What's been going on here?" Ruel asked sharply, as he stood in front of the prisoners, looking around at the evidences of the visit as displayed in the kitchen.

As a matter of course Larry made no reply, because of the gag in his mouth; but when Frank had removed it, the boy began to use his tongue very vigorously.

"What right had you to go off an' leave me here alone?" he cried in a fury of rage. "It

was a mighty mean thing to do, 'cause you mighter known them villains would come!"

"You had the door shut and bolted within two seconds after we left," Frank replied, striving hard, but unsuccessfully, to repress his mirth, for surely Larry presented a most comical figure as he strained at his fetters of rope.

"Of course the door was bolted," Larry shrieked; "but you'd made sich a row when I didn't open it quick enough, that I never stopped to find out whether it was you or Lander who was knockin'."

"Then you were foolish enough to open the shanty when they came?" Ruel asked sharply. "After being so afraid of the crowd that you didn't dare step outside, you unlocked the door without knowing who might come in?"

"How did I know it was that gang?" And now, instead of storming, Larry began to whine. "You said I mustn't wait when you wanted to get in, an' I was only carryin' out orders. They knocked same's you fellers had done, an' of course I thought it was all right, 'cause you'd jest about had time to go to the shore an' come back."

"Why didn't they take this fellow with them?" Frank asked as he pulled the coat sleeve from Hot Morgan's mouth.

"They said he wasn't any use on account of bein' afraid of his own shadder."

"So they left him to pair up with you. Your friend Leander isn't quite so big an idiot as he looks," Ruel said with a hearty laugh. "I see they have overhauled the camp pretty thoroughly."

"They've carried off every blessed thing we had, an' now it's a case of starvin', 'cause Elish won't come over here in a week!" and again Larry gave way to anger. "What're you goin' to do now we haven't got the least little thing to eat?"

"Go hungry, I reckon, unless you and Morgan can muster courage enough to help us tackle the thieves," Ruel said thoughtfully. "If both of you together had the spunk of one boy, we could soon have those fellows where they belong. Here are we—four of us—whining because two have cleaned out the pantry, when, as a matter of course, we should be jumping in on them before they've had time to get a hearty meal."

"How do you know I haven't got any spunk?" Larry asked with a faint imitation of bravery, and Frank replied with a hearty laugh:

"If you have, it has been concealed remarkably well since we've had the pleasure of your acquaintance. Do you dare go with us in chase of Leander?"

"Of course I do; but if it should come to a fight he could wipe the earth up with me," and once more Larry began to whine.

"Certainly he can, if you think so," Ruel said angrily. "We could soon put those fellows in a hole if you would do ever so little toward lending a hand."

"Give me half a chance, an' see what I can do!" Hot Morgan said, speaking for the first time since Ruel and Frank had entered. "I'll show Lander an' Bill what it means to play sich a trick on me after we'd agreed to stick together!"

Ruel looked up quickly as if about to make immediate reply, and then, evidently changing his mind, he went into the kitchen, saying to Frank as he did so:

"Let's find out what those fellows took

away, before we decide on anything. There's plenty of time in which to say what shall be done, for it's certain they won't make much of a fist at raft building."

"They've taken every blessed thing we had!" Larry cried as he followed the city boys into the kitchen. "What's more, the villains lugged off mother's baskets, an' I'll catch it hot when we get back. Oh, dear! oh, dear! Shall we ever see home again, or must we starve to death right here?"

"Stop that howling!" Frank said angrily. "Did Leander take anything besides the food?"

"I saw Bill Dean luggin' off the ax."

Ruel wheeled about suddenly, and for the first time a look of dismay overspread his face.

"Then it's good-bye to our chances for building a raft! I'd been thinking we had a show of putting those fellows in a hole; but it seems they have done their work in good shape. Now we've got to fight our way through, or else settle down to being hungry."

"I know where them fellers counted on sleepin', an' probably they've taken to the same

place all the stuff that was took away from here," Hot Morgan said as he joined his captors in the kitchen, for now since his own party had cast him off, so to speak, there was no longer any pretense of considering him a prisoner.

"I reckon we wouldn't have to go very far from the spring in order to find them," Ruel said carelessly. "This island isn't so large that they can get any very long distance away, and when we are ready it won't be difficult to come up with them. The first question is whether we're in shape for a pitched battle, because it isn't reasonable to suppose those fellows will give up what has been stolen without making an attempt to hold it!"

"Of course we are in shape for a battle!" Frank cried sharply. "When there's nothing else that can be done, it doesn't take long to decide!"

Larry had nothing to say. It was evident that even the fact of belonging to a party which outnumbered the enemy two to one did not serve to increase his courage, and Ruel whispered to his cousin:

"Come outside where we can talk the mat-

ter over alone. We can't count on Larry for the least little bit of help, for he's growing white around the mouth with just thinking of what may happen, and the important question is as to whether Hot Morgan will be of any assistance?"

"If he isn't, we'll run the whole business ourselves," Frank said sharply. "You and I don't count on sitting down and sucking our thumbs when there are only two against us!"

"Surely we don't; but it won't pay to rush into a fight without any plan whatsoever. Sit down under this tree where we can keep an eye out for trouble, either from Leander or our own two cowards, and we'll talk it over."

CHAPTER XI

A SLIGHT ADVANTAGE

It did not please Larry Duffield to have the city boys hold a conference in which he was not allowed to take part, and as soon as Ruel and Frank had seated themselves under a large tree where they could have the camp, as well as the path leading to it from the shore, well in view, Larry came out of the shanty looking thoroughly displeased.

"See here, what're you two fellers up to?" he demanded angrily. "You don't wanter be playin' any funny tricks on me, or you'll get yourselves inter a snarl."

"What do you mean?" Ruel asked in amazement, while Frank gazed at the country lad as if believing he had suddenly lost his senses.

"I mean jest what I say," and now Larry spoke boldly, as he advanced toward the lads whom he had been employed to "look after," with a certain swagger which did not compare well with his previous display of cowardice.

"You're hatchin' up some kind of a plan to give me the slip, that's what you're doin', an' I won't stand any sich nonsense!"

"What in the name of goodness have you got in your head now?" Ruel asked, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to speak.

"Look here," and now Larry had worked himself into such a fever of suspicion as to be brave enough to say that which was in his mind. "You've called me all kinds of an idiot ever since Lander's gang stole our canoe; but I ain't quite so silly as not to know somethin' is up when you come way out here to talk! What have you got to say that I mustn't know?"

"Oh, you make me tired!" Frank cried with a laugh, which betokened anger rather than mirth. "Since you haven't backbone enough to raise a hand in your own defense, we'd be foolish to let you hear our plans; but don't get the ridiculous idea that we're trying to play any trick on you. Whatever we do is for your good, as well as our own."

"Then why don't you want me to hear what you're talkin' about?"

"Because, in the first place it wouldn't be of any advantage, in view of the fact that you're so afraid of Leander as not to trust yourself outside the shanty, and then again, if he should happen to get hold of you while we were away, it would be an easy matter for him to frighten you into telling everything we proposed to do."

"You can set it down for a fact," Ruel added, "that all we want just now is to leave this island, and when we go you'll be with us —that is, if you don't get so reckless as to let Leander or Bill Dean take you prisoner."

This suggestion, thoughtlessly though it had been spoken, took from Larry all his assumption of bravery, and he looked furtively at the open door of the shanty, as if meditating an immediate retreat.

"Where's Hot Morgan?" Frank asked.

"Lyin' down in one of the bunks. It seems like he was willin' to be a prisoner."

"I guess that's so. The other fellows are going to be in considerable trouble when we get on the mainland again, for it's a certain thing that some one will come soon to find out how we are getting along," Ruel said,

purposely raising his voice sufficiently for the prisoner to hear the words. "Frank and I are trying to decide what it's wisest to do, and since you don't want to have any hand in paying Leander off for the mischief he has done, the best thing you can do is to go into the camp."

"You wouldn't be mean enough to go off an' leave me here alone with that gang?" Larry asked imploringly.

"Of course we wouldn't. We claim to be somewhere near square, and even though you haven't done what you ought, since this trouble began, we wouldn't sneak away from you, if we had the chance. Go into the camp with Morgan, and whatever we may succeed in accomplishing will be to the advantage of all, even including the prisoner."

Larry stood gazing intently at Ruel while one might have counted ten, as if trying to assure himself the city lad had spoken no more than the truth, and then did as he was bidden.

When he was inside the camp, with the door closed, and probably locked, Ruel said with an air of decision:

"We're not going to spend our time running after these fellows, if my advice is taken."

"But we mustn't sit here sucking our thumbs, for that's about all we can do now that they have got the ax——"

"And that we are bound to get from them in some way. It isn't very likely that there'll be much of the cooked food left by this time to-morrow, and instead of having a regular battle for what little they may have of that, let us put our wits to the task of getting the ax."

"Why that instead of the food?" Frank asked in surprise.

"Because it is of more value. We can get along for one day without anything to eat, and not stand much chance of starving to death. If we can gain possession of the ax it won't be any great task to put together such a raft as will serve to fish from. We've got lines and hooks; I noticed that they didn't carry off the salt pork, nor the bag of potatoes. Therefore with a few fish, we should be able to live till Elish comes, and at the same time get a little enjoyment out of it all."

"I don't like the idea of allowing those fellows to carry off the provisions, without having to answer for it in some way."

"We'll get the ax first, if that is possible, and then, if you're aching to give them a lesson, we'll set about it, in case we get the chance."

"Have your own way about it," Frank replied, rising to his feet as if believing the conference was at an end. "I'll do whatever you say, until there appears to be a show for getting even, and then you shall give me the chance to run matters."

"That's a bargain, and now we'll creep up near the spring, for I reckon that's where we'll find Leander and Bill, unless they have set about raft building again."

Then Ruel went to the window of the camp, where he said, speaking loudly, that the occupants might have no necessity for opening the door:

"Frank and I are going to find out what those fellows are about. Will you come with us, or do you prefer to stay here?"

"Somebody's got to look after the camp, an' we may as well do that part of the work,"

Larry Duffield replied quickly, and in rather a shaky voice, causing Ruel to laugh heartily as he rejoined his cousin.

Then the city boys walked down the path twenty or thirty yards, after which Ruel led the way among the foliage in the direction of the spring, and they were yet fifty feet or more from their destination, when it was possible to hear the hum of voices.

"They are trying to find out how much can be eaten, with no thought that by morning they will be hungry again," Frank whispered, and his cousin replied in a tone of caution:

"We'll creep up till it's possible to hear what they are saying, but you are to remember that we don't count on having any row, no matter how good a chance they give us. We're after the ax, and we'll get it, too."

To this Frank made no reply, but followed cautiously in his cousin's footsteps until, by making their way through the thickest of the shrubbery, the two arrived at a point where it was possible to see the enemy.

Leander and Bill were seated on a log near the spring, with both of Mrs. Duffield's bas-

kets in front of them, and it could plainly be seen that by this time they were eating simply in order to devour the store of provisions, for it was evident their hunger had long since been satisfied.

Near by, leaning against a tree, was the ax which the city boys coveted. It was some little distance from the lads who had stolen it, on the opposite side of the spring, and, after eyeing it greedily a few seconds, Ruel whispered:

"I'm going to creep around on that side and get the ax. It's likely they will see me after I have my hands on it, but by that time they won't be able to take it from me if you jump when they make the first move."

"Don't be afraid but that I'll do my share," Frank replied, "and I'm hoping they'll make a fight for it, because it would do me solid good to hurt those fellows."

"Better not set your heart on anything of that kind. We can hurt them most by getting back what has been stolen, for in the morning they won't have any the best of us, if they keep on eating."

Then, without waiting for a reply, Ruel left

his cousin as he crept with infinite care through the foliage, moving slowly lest even the rustling of a leaf should betray his purpose.

"Them city fellers won't believe they're so awful smart when they find out that we've got all the grub," Leander said in a tone of triumph, but speaking indistinctly because of the fulness of his mouth, and Bill Dean added with a laugh:

"I wonder if they're still down there on the shore waitin' for us to come back? That was a mighty cute trick of yours to sneak back to the camp after you happened to see 'em hidin' in the bushes. Say, wasn't Larry scared most inter fits?"

"That's what he was, an' it did me good to see him, but jest the same, Bill, if we don't get away from here before Elish comes over in that power boat of hisn, we stand a good show of bein' frightened worse'n Larry was. Don't think I'm gettin' weak in the knees on account of the way we've warmed things for the city fellers; but it's dead sure we're goin' to catch it hot an' strong if we can't leave the island mighty quick."

"I thought we was countin' on buildin' a raft," Bill said carelessly. "Now we've got an ax it won't be sich a terrible hard job, 'cause all we're needin' is logs enough to keep our heads on top of the water."

"But I'm thinkin' them city fellers will do all they can to stop us. It ain't likely they're goin' to see us sail off without kickin' up the worst kind of a row, an' how are we goin' to build the littlest kind of a raft if they're makin' things hot?"

"We'll do it after they've gone to bed to-night, an' by mornin' we'll be home. I'm kinder thinkin' we're goin' to get quite a dose from our folks for stayin' away so long; but what——"

Bill ceased speaking very suddenly and sprang to his feet, for at the moment he was looking in the direction of the ax, and saw Ruel step boldly out from amid the underbrush as he seized the tool, raising it threateningly above his head.

At the same instant a rustling of the foliage in the opposite direction caused the country boys to wheel suddenly around, and there stood Frank, looking as if it would

please him right well to come to closer quarters.

"What're you fellers up to?" Leander yelled, starting as if to rush upon Ruel, but evidently thinking better of it, for already had he learned that these lads from the city could defend themselves and a little more.

"We came after this ax that you took," Ruel replied quietly as he advanced toward his cousin, much as though it made no difference to him what the country boys might attempt to do. "As I look at it, you've got to the end of your rope, so far as making mischief is concerned, and now the time of reckoning is bound to come. You've stuffed yourselves with the food until I don't fancy there is much left, and by morning you'll be hungry again."

"What about you?" Bill cried mockingly, edging a trifle nearer his leader as if believing it necessary that the two stand very close together.

"We shall get along all right on fried pork and potatoes, I fancy. If you fellows had been wise, you'd taken all the stores with you."

Leander and Bill looked at each other in dismay as Ruel ceased speaking, and then Bill said jeeringly:

"Strikes me I wouldn't crow, if I'd been done up same's you two have. How long did you stay on the shore waitin' for us to come back?"

"We're willing to admit that you did fool us that time," Frank replied in a tone of good nature; "but, as Ruel says, you have come to an end of your fun, and from now out you can figure out how you're going to settle the score that has been run up, for you'll be called to an accounting mighty soon after our parents know what you've done."

"That'll be all right," Leander said loftily. "We haven't got through with you chumps yet, an' when we have it'll be a case of our leavin' the island, for we don't have to stay here a great while after we've finished you."

"You were singing a different tune when Ruel took up the ax, for I heard all that was said. From this out it shall be our business to do up in a thorough fashion any one who interferes with us."

By this time Ruel had walked directly in

front of the country boys to where his cousin was standing, and now he said:

"There's no reason why we should swap more words with you. It is as Frank says: 'Some one will get hurt badly if you don't keep your distance.'"

Then, before either of the country lads could reply, Ruel plunged into the bushes, going in the direction of the path, and, as a matter of course, Frank followed close at his heels; but Leander shouted in derision:

"It's too bloomin' bad that you fellows have got to hurt somebody, ain't it? P'rhaps you've got a private horspitle somewhere handy, so's them you hurt can be took care of till they die!"

"Don't answer," Ruel said as Frank halted angrily. "We did what we came to do, and what's more, let them see what we were about. Now, if we're wise, we can keep the upper hand of those fellows, and at the same time get some fun out of camping. We'll build a raft so Larry can go out fishing, while we'll stand close by on the shore to keep the countrymen at a distance. Even though we don't get any fish, we can keep ourselves alive on

fried pork and roasted potatoes, and when they give out, we'll knock together something that will carry one of us over to the other shore."

CHAPTER XII

WORKING AND WATCHING

WHILE the city boys were walking toward the camp Ruel had made up his mind exactly what should be done, and as soon as possible he set about it.

On arriving at the shanty it was necessary to show themselves at the window before Larry Duffield would open the door. He had been fooled once, to his cost, and had no idea of being so careless again.

"Can't you tell by our voices who it is?" Frank asked impatiently, as he pounded vigorously on the door while Ruel stood looking in at the window.

"I don't count on givin' Lander's gang the chance to jump in on me same's they did before," Larry replied grimly. "Where'd you get that ax?" he added in surprise as Ruel entered.

"Went up to the spring and took it," Ruel said with a laugh.

"Where was Lander?"

"Close by, stuffing himself with food in order to make sure there wouldn't be anything to eat to-morrow."

"But didn't he jump on you?" and Larry's eyes really appeared to be bulging from their sockets, so great was his astonishment.

"He didn't dare make a move toward it," Frank cried triumphantly. "If you fellows around here had stood your ground now and then, when he tried to bully you, Leander wouldn't have been able to run matters as it seems he has been doing."

"Was Bill Dean with him?" Hot Morgan asked, and Frank replied laughingly:

"They were both looking on when Ruel walked up and took the ax. The most they dared to do was threaten what would be done at some other time; but words from such fellows as those don't amount to anything at all."

"Well, what're you goin' to do now?" Larry asked with a fine tone of sarcasm. "We can't eat the ax."

"There's no real need of eating anything before night, and by that time I believe we

shall be able to get up quite a dinner. You and Hot Morgan are going out fishing."

"What?" Larry exclaimed in alarm as Ruel ceased speaking. "How can we do anything of that kind when we haven't got a boat?"

"Frank and I count, with your help, on building a raft."

"It would take a week to make one large enough to carry the three of us across the lake!"

"We don't intend to go across the lake until your friend Elish comes after us, and even then we may conclude to stay a while longer. We came over here to have some fun camping out, and it isn't in our plan that Leander and Bill shall prevent us."

Larry gazed at Ruel as if believing he had taken leave of his senses, and Frank added:

"It strikes me that if we're going to make a try at catching fish we should be getting about the job, for the sun will set in a couple of hours."

"Do you fellows think you can make a raft big enough in that time?" Larry asked, still seemingly bewildered.

"We count on making what will serve to keep you and Morgan from drowning, and that ——"

"Well, I tell you right here that you don't get me to take any chances of fishin' while Leander an' Bill are hangin' 'round!"

"What do you say about it?" and Ruel turned to face Hot Morgan, who replied promptly, but with a look of apprehension toward the thicket, where it was reasonable to suppose Leander and Bill were even now in hiding:

"If you fellers think we can get ashore without havin' the fish taken away from us, in case we ketch any, I'm ready to try it. I'll tell you the way it is with me; I ain't such a terrible fighter, 'cordin' to Lander's idee, an' I've got myself in a mighty bad muss by botherin' you. All I'm askin' is that you'll give me a chance to square up for what's been done."

"That's the way to talk!" Frank cried approvingly.

"And what's more, we don't ask you to have any row with Leander or Bill," Ruel added. "Frank and I will look after that

part of the business, while you help in whatever way may be possible. We're going to knock a small raft together, so that you or Larry can push off far enough from the shore to stand a chance of getting fish. While you're at that job we'll see to it they don't come anywhere near you."

"Got any lines?" and Master Morgan looked wonderfully relieved in mind. "If I don't hump myself, when it comes to anythin' that ain't fightin', you can kick me all over this island."

"We'll leave Larry here to look after the camp, since he doesn't dare even to fish without permission from Leander," Ruel said in a matter-of-fact tone as he began overhauling the baggage in search of lines and hooks, while Larry cried as if it pleased him to find flaws in the plan:

"You can fish till you're gray-headed; but you won't get anything. Besides, what about bait?"

"We'll look after that," Ruel said quietly as he brought forth the tackle. "It will be odd if we can't find something on this island."

"But s'posen Leander an' Bill come here while you're playin' fool tricks with a raft?" Larry asked nervously.

"It's up to you to answer that question. You don't dare do anything but look after the camp, and, therefore, should be able to say how it is to be done."

Larry hesitated, opened his mouth as if to speak, and closed it again as he went to the window to look out. The fact of the matter was that he would have preferred to suffer from hunger rather than run the slightest risk of being overhauled by the terrible "Lander."

"Here are the hooks and lines; take what you want, Morgan, and while we are cutting down trees for the raft you can hunt for worms or grubs."

"See here!" Larry cried as Ruel went out of the shanty, followed by Frank and Hot, "are you really goin' to leave me here all alone?"

"Why, Larry, you can come with us if you choose."

"I ain't crazy enough to take chances on the shore."

"Then you'd better stay right where you

are," Frank said, laughingly, as he followed his cousin. "Perhaps it would be a good idea to cover up your head, after you've locked the door, and then there won't be any danger of seeing Leander if he happens to come this way."

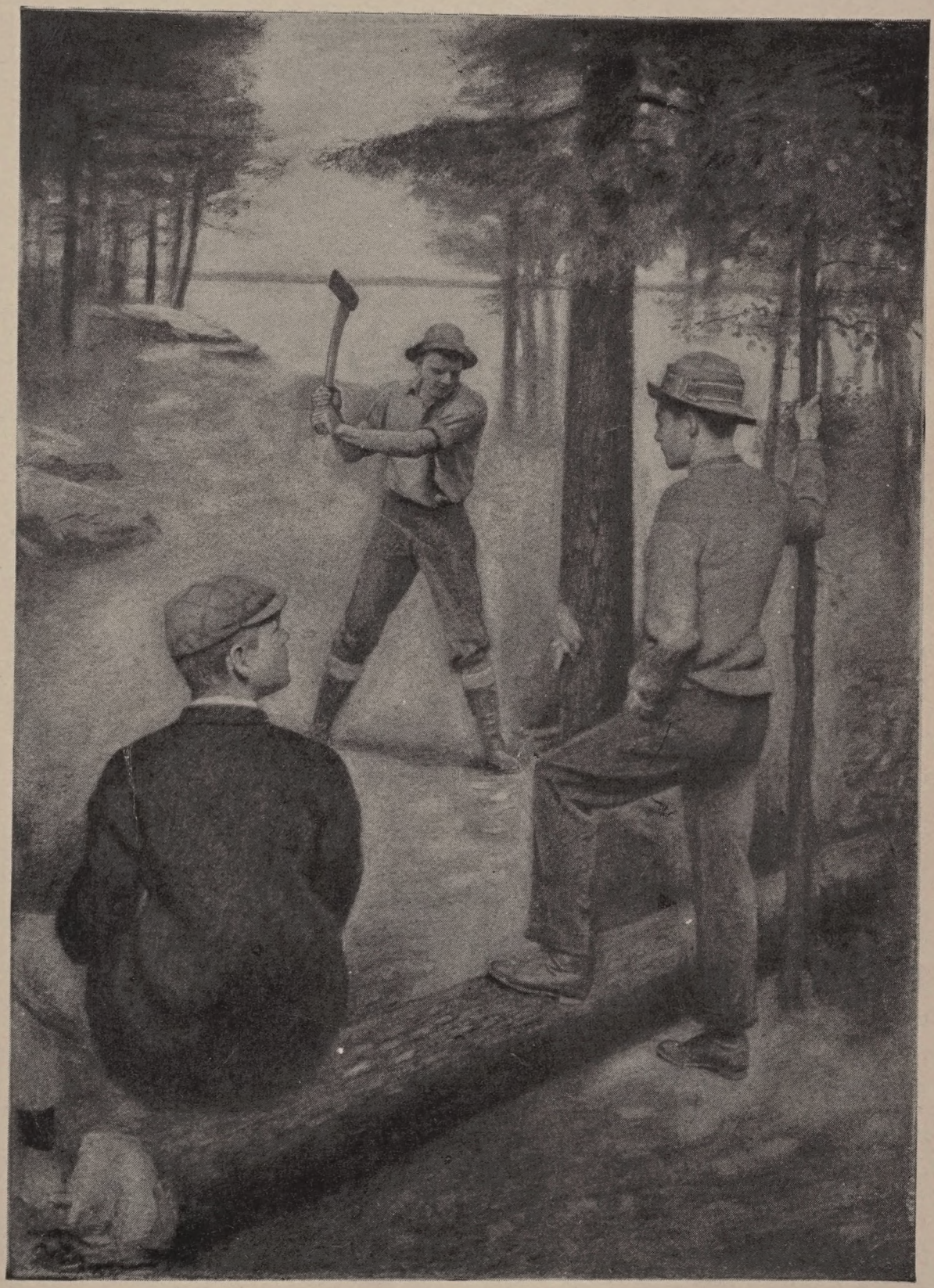
The slamming of the door was the only reply, and even Hot Morgan appeared to think that Larry's cowardice was comical.

Ruel led the way to the shore in the most direct line, arriving at a place where were growing five or six small trees, and regarding these he asked Hot:

"Do you believe there is timber enough here to keep you afloat?"

"If I'm goin' alone, two will do, if you cut them into short lengths. Give me the ax, for I reckon I'm more in the habit of swingin' it than you."

The ex-member of Leander's gang set about the task in a businesslike manner, and he promised to make short work of it. While he was thus engaged Ruel and Frank stood guard, believing that the noise of the blows would quickly bring the enemy down upon them.



HE PROMISED TO MAKE SHORT WORK OF IT

And in this they were not mistaken. Young Morgan had felled but one of the trees, and was chopping it into eight-foot lengths, using branches as well as trunk in order to economize both wood and labor, when Ruel espied Leander and Bill creeping stealthily down through the bushes toward them.

"None of that!" he cried sharply. "If you want to see what we are about, come out like decent fellows and look; but don't sneak up on us, or there may be considerable mischief done."

"What's goin' on here?" Leander asked in a surly tone as he stepped out from among the bushes.

"By watching us long enough you stand a good chance of finding out," Frank cried in a tone of good humor.

Leander stood a full minute as if rendered speechless by the daring of these boys after he had warned them against venturing on the shore, and then held a brief whispered conversation with Bill, after which he said in a tone of command:

"You want to stop any sich funny busi-

ness, an' do it right off, 'cause we don't count on lettin' you leave this island till we get good an' ready."

"Watch us a little while an' see how you've scared us," Frank cried laughingly. "I reckon it's up to us to say what shall or shan't be done on this island, and if you don't think so just start something."

"Keep right on chopping," Ruel said in a low tone to Hot Morgan, who had ceased his work when Leander first appeared, as if thinking the coming of that young gentleman would put an end to the task. "We'll see to it that those fellows don't get anywhere near you."

"I ain't so scared of them as I was of you, an' that's why they had sich a good chance to call me a coward," Hot replied as he resumed his work, and Leander and Bill would have been blind indeed if they had failed to see that the city boys were prepared to defend the laborer.

During the next two minutes not a word was spoken, and then Leander cried peremptorily:

"Drop that ax, Hot Morgan, or I'll

warm your jacket 'twixt now an' Saturday night!"

"He has discharged himself from your regiment and enlisted with us, so be careful how you interfere with him," Ruel cried warningly.

Again Leander took counsel with Bill, as if the change in the situation perplexed him, and meanwhile Hot swung the ax vigorously until he had what appeared to be sufficient material for such a raft as it was proposed to build.

"We can tie the logs together with vines, and I'll lend a hand. Ruel won't have any trouble in keeping those imitation toughs at a distance," Frank said as he waded into the water knee-deep, and, without intending to do so, he moved in such a manner that a clump of bushes hid him entirely from view of Leander and Bill.

"You needn't stretch your necks so much, for I'll tell you what they are doing," Ruel said, as the country boys twisted and turned to see what was going on. "We've decided to have some fish to take the place of the food you took, and one of them is going out on a raft to catch a few."

"P'rhaps he will, an' then again, p'rhaps he won't," Leander growled. "I reckon me an' Bill will have somethin' to say 'bout that. We've got the upper hand of you fellers, an' count on holdin' the grip."

"Now's the time if you have anything to say; Frank and I are ready for whatever you can scare up in the line of trouble. As for having the upper hand of us, I'm inclined to think you are making the mistake of your life."

The country boys held their ground, as if about to make an attack, and Ruel stood ready to oppose them at the first show of mischief, until Frank came out from behind the bushes and said:

"Morgan has pushed off, and he has half a dozen fat worms for bait."

"Is the raft stout enough to hold him?"

"Well, it is after a fashion; it is about level with the surface, and he can't wiggle around very much without getting into trouble; but he claims that there's no need of going very far from the point. If the vines give way he can swim ashore. What are those fellows thinking of doing?"

"Trying to get their courage up for a fight, but they are finding it hard work. They're ripe for any kind of mischief, and it won't be well to stop watching them for a little minute."

At this moment a cry of triumph was heard from Hot Morgan, and when Frank had hastened to the water's edge he saw the ex-prisoner exultantly holding up a big black perch.

"It won't need more'n three like this feller to give us all the dinner we can eat!" he cried gleefully. "Stand by to ketch him, an' I'll soon show you another!"

Frank caught the fish deftly as Hot threw him ashore, and ran at once to show his cousin the prize.

"This doesn't look much like being starved out," he cried, holding the perch where all the boys might see him. "Morgan couldn't have had his line in the water more than a minute before hooking him!"

It was evident from the expression on their faces that Leander and Bill were not only vexed, but decidedly disturbed in mind, because of the fisherman's success. They must

have understood that by leaving Hot a prisoner in the camp they had given a decided advantage to the city boys, who could watch while he worked, and it was not pleasant to thus realize that they had been foolish.

"If such fish as that can be caught close to the camp, I don't care if Elish doesn't come after us for a week!" Ruel cried triumphantly. "Now we stand a chance of enjoying ourselves, for it'll be no more than sport to keep you at a proper distance!"

"Crow while you've got the chance," Leander said angrily. "We'll soon put a stop to that kind of fun, an' then will come our turn."

"Perhaps; but I doubt——"

Another shout from Hot interrupted Ruel, and a few seconds later Frank held up a second perch, even larger than the first.

"We'll wait till he gets one more, and then cook supper," Ruel said, and he had no more than spoken before Hot shouted gleefully over the capture of the third fish.

"Pull the raft ashore, and we'll get back to camp," Frank called to Morgan, and the latter said ruefully:

"Them fellers will steal her jest as soon as we have gone."

"That's a fact; but I don't see how we can help ourselves," Frank replied, and then he ran forward to learn whether Ruel had anything in mind to prevent Leander and Bill from taking some mean advantage of their handiwork.

CHAPTER XIII

REAL SPORT

"If we leave the raft here, and I suppose that is what we must do, those fellows will haul her away, or try their luck at fishing," Frank said in a whisper to his cousin. "She isn't such a valuable craft that we need to shed many tears over losing her, yet at the same time I don't feel inclined to chop down trees for their benefit."

"There's no good reason why we should leave her here," Ruel said after a brief pause. "It wouldn't be very much of a task to carry the timbers up to the camp, and they can be fastened together again whenever we want to use them."

"I was a thick-head not to have thought of that same thing!" Frank exclaimed as he ran back to the water's edge, and a few seconds later the ropes of vines had been cut, while the small timbers were on the shore.

"Gather up as many as you can carry, and

we'll take them to the camp, where they can be used when we're needing more fish," Frank said to Hot Morgan, and an expression of satisfaction came over Hot's face as he understood that his late comrades were to be deprived of any opportunity to take advantage of his labors.

A howl of rage went up from both the country boys when they saw the precautions which the lads from the city were taking to avoid unnecessary labor with the dull ax, and as soon as he could master his anger sufficiently to speak, Leander cried :

"If you fellers think you're goin' to run things all your own way on this island, you're makin' a mighty big mistake. I don't want to lame you for life ; but I'll have to do it if you keep on the way you've begun."

"Look here," Ruel said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Our fathers hired this island, and so long as the rent is paid, it is the same as our property ; while you have no right here whatsoever. If you think, however, that it is possible for you to take charge of matters, don't fret about doing us any very serious damage, for we stand ready to run all the risks

of that kind. Get on to the camp, Morgan, and we'll see that these country toughs can't come near enough to do you any mischief."

Hot did not wait for further instructions. Even though the city boys stood ready to defend him, he was literally trembling with fear while Leander thus threatened, and desired only to put the greatest possible distance between himself and the bully in the shortest space of time.

While one might have counted twenty Leander and Bill stood directly in front of Ruel and Frank, as if it was in their minds to make an immediate attack; but the city lads, instead of showing signs of fear, appeared perfectly willing for an encounter, and Leander said to his companion with a laugh, much as though it was possible for him to do exactly as he pleased:

"I reckon we'd better get our camp inter shape before we do anythin' else. After we've rigged up a place same's we agreed on, we'll come down here an' show these fellers that they can't put on any city frills with us."

"Take your own time about it," Frank cried sharply; for the tone in which Leander spoke

irritated him more than did the words; "but don't forget that if you do kick up another row we won't allow it to end till you've had the flogging of your lives!"

"Don't let them see that they can provoke you," Ruel whispered warningly. "If we keep our temper, and at the same time show we're ready to meet any move that may be made, they won't get much satisfaction out of us."

"You fellers do a good deal of floggin' with your tongues; but I take notice that you ain't doin' much of anythin' else," Leander cried mockingly, and, despite Ruel's words of caution, Frank replied:

"It hasn't been so very long since all hands of you were begging for mercy, and we were soft enough to let up. That sort of thing won't happen again, however, and when we get you in another tight place, you'll suffer!"

"All right; we'll think over what you've said, so's to kinder get used to it, an' then we shan't feel so terrible bad 'bout bein' chewed into little pieces," Leander cried with a laugh, and then he and Bill disappeared amid the bushes.

"There won't be any fight," said Ruel, "for those fellows don't dare to tackle us. All we need do is to show that we're ready for them, so there isn't any good reason why you should lose your temper."

"It makes me chafe under the collar to hear those country jays talk as if they could do whatever pleased them," Frank replied, all trace of his ill temper having disappeared. "I do hope, however, that they'll try to be funny just once more, so we can serve them out in proper shape."

While talking, the others had been walking in the direction of the camp, and were now close to the door.

Ruel knocked, and at the same time shouted:

"Open up, Larry. There's nothing to be afraid of now." And he added as Larry opened the door ever so cautiously, "If Morgan got back safely, you've already seen that we can catch fish in this lake, even though we haven't any boat."

"I didn't say it couldn't be done if you built a raft," Larry replied in a tone of the greatest good humor. "If you fellers hadn't

been in sich a terrible hurry I'd gone with yer; but it seemed as if you couldn't wait a minute."

"Are you certain you really wanted to go with us?" Frank asked laughingly, as he left the door wide open after entering, and Larry replied, as he hastened to close it:

"I wasn't so terribly keen after goin' fishin', for I don't think there's very much fun to it; but I'd been willin' to help out if I was needed."

"Leave the door open!" Frank cried when Larry was about to shut it. "The weather is too hot for us to be sealed up in this little camp without a chance for any fresh air."

"But Lander'll make it mighty hot for——"

"Leander will look after his own business, leaving us severely alone, if he has half as much sense as an ordinary fellow should have. If I thought leaving the door open would bring him down on us, I'd nail it back so we couldn't close it, for I'm gettin' mighty eager to have a bit of exercise with that young scoundrel."

Then, as if to show beyond the possibility

of a doubt that he had no fear as to what Leander and Bill might be able to do, Frank brought a chair from the inside of the camp, tilted it back against the building, and seated himself in the most comfortable manner possible, while Larry hurried into the kitchen with every evidence of fear on his face, as he whispered to Hot Morgan :

"Of course I don't want Lander to get the best of the city fellers ; but it wouldn't make me feel bad a little bit, if he'd give that Frank Gilmore sich a dose as would take some of the gimp out of him."

"If anythin' like that happened we'd stand a mighty good show of gettin' it hot an' strong," Master Morgan replied as he set about cleaning the fish. "We'll stick mighty close to the city chaps if we know which side of our bread is buttered."

Then the ex-member of "Lander's gang" made his preparations for frying the fish, while Larry stood helplessly by, although he had claimed that, as an amateur, he was no mean cook, and when Ruel came into the kitchen Larry said, as if some personal wrong was being done him :

"What's the use of cookin' fish when you haven't got anythin' else to go with 'em?"

"Frank and I have an idea that fried fish with roasted potatoes go far ahead of nothing to eat, and therefore, as we look at it, there's a good bit of use. No one will make any complaint if you don't even so much as taste of the perch, so I can't see that you'll be any worse off than if we sat down deliberately to starve."

Then Ruel began to do what he could toward helping the cook, while Frank was sitting outside the camp to show his contempt for Leander and Bill, and a most appetizing odor was already creeping out of the open door when suddenly there came a great crash on the side of the shanty.

"What is the matter?" Ruel cried as he ran out from the kitchen just in time to see Frank disappearing amid the bushes, while a rock half as big as his head, which was lying near the door, was sufficient evidence as to what had caused the crash.

"Lander has begun to square things!" Larry wailed from his station behind the

stove, and Hot replied, his face paling even beneath the many coats of sunburn :

" That's what's happenin'. There's a rock that must weigh near to twenty pounds layin' close to the chair your city feller was sittin' in, an' the wonder is that he wasn't smashed all to pieces ! "

" Come back, Frank ! Come back ! " Ruel shouted at the full strength of his lungs. " Can't you see that all they want is to get you out among the trees alone ? "

Then, fearing that his cousin might come to some harm, he ran at full speed until he overtook him, when he literally forced the angry boy back to the camp.

" They shan't play any such games as that without being made to know what it costs ! " Frank cried, struggling to release himself from his cousin's grasp ; but Ruel held him firmly, saying as he dragged the lad along :

" There is no sense in doing exactly as they hoped you would, and you shall be more sensible. If we go around aching for a row, it won't be possible to have any real sport out of living in a camp ; but by attending strictly

to our own affairs, we can have a pretty good time."

"But I've got a right to sit outside the camp, and those jays shan't prevent me!" Frank replied angrily, yet he ceased to struggle against Ruel, walking quietly by his side until they were come to the shanty once more.

"Of course you've got a right to sit outside; but you only did so to show those fellows you weren't afraid of them, and didn't get fun enough out of it to pay for the chances of having your head broken," and again Ruel summoned Larry to open the door, adding when Larry timidly obeyed the command: "Now we're going to have fried fish and roasted potatoes; after we've eaten our fill you shall decide whether we're to spend our time fooling with a couple of toughs, or if we are to get what sport may be coming our way."

The food which Hot Morgan prepared was good evidence that he had a fair idea as to how a simple meal, such as was then on the table, should be cooked, and when Frank had eaten his share of it he was in a better frame

of mind, although his belief as to what should be done to Leander and Bill by way of punishment was in no way changed.

Larry had not disdained to eat rather more than his share of the food, even though there was not much of variety, and, having devoured the last morsel that remained in the frying-pan after the hunger of his companions had been satisfied, he asked sharply :

"Now what're you goin' to do 'bout it?"

"About what?" Ruel asked with no great show of curiosity.

"'Bout the rock that come mighty near smashin' Frank's head?"

"What do you think should be done?"

"Lander an' Bill oughter be thumped till their teeth drop out, that's what they need."

"Are you ready to help do it?" Ruel asked as he piled the logs, which had formed the raft, carefully in a corner of the kitchen, and hid the ax under the bedclothing in one of the bunks.

"I'll do my share," Larry replied with no slight show of hesitation.

"Very well, you shall have a chance. We ought to have some water first, so that it

won't be necessary to go down to the shore after dark. Get one of the kettles; I'll take the bucket, and Frank shall carry the pitcher."

"But, see here," and Larry looked alarmed. "What's the sense in goin' for water till we need some? Lander an' Bill are most likely watchin' out for us, an' we'll have a reg'lar row."

"I'm allowing we shall have one before we do very much in the way of thumping them, so it makes little difference how soon it is begun. Are you ready?"

"See here, I ain't goin' 'round tryin' to stir up a fight, an' that's the whole of it!" Larry cried, no longer trying to hide his cowardice. "What's more, I won't go down to the shore for water, not if I never have another drop till Elish comes to take us off of this bloomin' old island, where I wish I'd never come!"

"I thought you weren't very eager to thump Leander," Ruel said with a laugh, and Frank added, as he took up the iron kettle:

"If you're going for water, come on. I'm

sick of seeing Larry drop into his boots whenever any one speaks of Leander. Are you going with us, Morgan?"

For reply Hot took up the bucket and Larry, with never the slightest show of shame on his face, stood by to bolt the door after his companions had gone out.

"Look here, fellers," Hot Morgan said, when they were so far from the camp on their way to the shore that it was possible to make certain there was no one lurking near by to hear the words, "if you'll stand 'round tomorrow, so's Lander and Bill shan't rough in, I'll cut enough more logs to make a raft that'll hold part of me out of water when I get tired of swimmin', an' put across to tell Elish that you're needin' him."

"You'd never be able to get so far!" Frank cried. "It must be full four miles!"

"I reckon it's nearer five, but that won't cut any figger. I needn't leave here till the wind is fair an' then it'll only be a case of swimmin' half the time. I know I can do it with a raft to rest on, an' I'd like to try it for the sake of showin' you fellers that I'm sorry I helped tow off your canoe."

Before either of the city lads could make reply to this proposition a commotion was heard in the underbrush just ahead of them and an instant later Leander and Bill appeared in the path, each armed with a formidable-looking club.

CHAPTER XIV

A CONFERENCE

THE sudden and unexpected appearance of Leander and Bill made it quite evident that a battle was imminent, and evidently Hot Morgan believed that those whom he had once obeyed implicitly were about to wreak revenge upon him, for he dropped the bucket as if it burned his hands, and would have run with all speed to the camp, had not Frank whispered angrily:

"Come, those chumps are only trying to scare us, and if you stand your ground they'll beat a retreat."

These words seemed to revive Hot Morgan's courage somewhat, for he took up the bucket once more, although taking good care to remain very close behind Frank, where he would not be exposed to the first attack.

Ruel, who had been leading, halted as if ready to defend himself, and his cousin, stepping to his side, said in a low tone:

"Now is the time when we'll show that precious Leander what it costs to be funny, and I hope he'll stay long enough to get it good and strong."

"I'm not aching for a row," Ruel replied in a whisper, "for it doesn't seem just the thing to spend our time fighting; but we'd better finish the job up brown this time, else we'll never have any peace while we stay here."

Then, instead of waiting for an attack, the city boys ran forward, and, greatly to their surprise, Leander and Bill immediately lowered their clubs.

"Look here," said Leander, "I reckon we'd better talk this thing over, 'cause there's no knowin' how long it may be before Elish comes, an' some of us will starve to death if we don't make a bargain."

"You didn't think of that when you ate all that food we brought with us!" Frank cried angrily, and his cousin understood that he was really disappointed because the enemy showed no signs of giving battle.

"We had to look out for ourselves, an' the only show was to get whatever was lyin'

'round loose," Leander said in a half-apologetic tone.

"And now that you have eaten everything which could be come at, you're ready to whine!" Frank cried, and Ruel whispered sternly:

"It's our fault if there's a fight. These fellows are ready to make some kind of a bargain, and it is for us to listen, instead of doing our best to make bad matters worse." Then, turning toward the enemy, he asked, "Well, what is it you want?"

"We didn't know but you fellers had got tired of tryin' to run things this way, an' we'd do what we could to help you out," Bill said, after waiting in vain a few seconds for the leader to reply.

"If you are here to make a bargain, that isn't the way to begin," Ruel interrupted, sternly. "We come pretty near being satisfied with the way matters are going, and don't ask you for any help. Unless you fellows are idiots, you understand that once we get over to the village you'll be in a mighty bad fix. Even in this part of the country boys can't go about stealing, as you have done, without

coming to grief sooner or later. Now, say what you've got on your minds, or get back to your camp."

The fact that the city boys were not eager to meet him half-way in a peace conference disconcerted the valiant Leander, who stammered and coughed in his efforts to put into words what he was eager to say.

"Do you want to keep on fightin' an' rowin' it, or are you willin' to fix things up?" he asked after a great effort, and Ruel had no little difficulty in repressing a smile, as he replied:

"We haven't anything to 'fix up.' We came over here to camp out, and you took our boat, afterward breaking into the shanty to rob us of food. You wouldn't be here, unable to get away, if you hadn't come here for mischief; so, as I look at it, you're the ones who must attend to the 'fixing.'"

"And we are perfectly willing to keep on fighting, if that is the way you put it," Frank added, showing more signs of anger each moment. "We are satisfied to have matters go along in this same style for a week to come, and we won't suffer so very much, either, we believe."

By this time even Bill Dean seemed at a

loss for words; but after a brief whispered consultation with Leander he dropped his club and stepped forward a few paces, as if to show that he was disposed to be friendly in case the city boys would permit him.

"Lander an' I might jest as well own up that we're in a mess, an' it's all our fault, 'cause we had no right to leave Hot where you could coax him over on your side. If we'd kept him with us, it wouldn't have been much of a job to get the best of you, 'cause Larry Duffield don't count for a little bit when it comes to a row, an' ——"

"You'd better stop right there," Ruel cried in a tone of irritation. "We don't care to hear you figure out how you could have got the best of us, for you tried a couple of times, when Morgan was with the crowd, and didn't make any very great fist at it. If you haven't anything different to say, we'll go on about our business."

"And we'll take precious good care that you don't hang around this part of the island any longer," Frank added, determined to let the enemy understand that he and Ruel were ready to defend their rights.

"But we thought you fellers would be willin' to make some kind of a bargain," Bill Dean said in an imploring tone.

"We must hear what sort of a bargain you want to make, before saying whether we are willing or not," Ruel replied gravely, and because he did not refuse offhand to entertain a proposition, Leander was emboldened to come forward once more.

"It's jest like this," he began, and Frank interrupted peremptorily:

"Drop that club if you count on making a trade."

Leander meekly allowed the stick to drop from his hands, and this show of submission so strengthened Hot Morgan's courage that he stepped out from behind Frank, taking up a position where he could the better see what was being done.

"Say, what kind of a trade would you fellers be willin' to make?" Leander cried.

"We haven't had any idea of making a trade, for we're satisfied with the way matters are going," Frank replied with a laugh, but Ruel, who believed it was their duty to listen to any sort of overtures for peace, replied quietly:

"It is for you to say what you want, and we'll consider it."

"We want you to give us a fair show with yourselves," Bill Dean cried quickly, and Frank asked scornfully:

"So you're thinking that after doing all the mischief you can, and having come to an end of your rope, we will take you in with us, eh?"

"I ain't sayin' as we've really come to the end of our rope, 'cause I s'pose we can squeak along somehow, even if Elish don't come for a week," Leander said meekly. "But, look here, I'm sorry we tried to make trouble; but we have, an' I'm willin' to agree that we've got the worst of it. We haven't any right to think you'll make a trade with us; but if you will, we'll do whatever you say is the square thing, an' won't ask to be let off when all hands get back to the village, either."

Frank was about to make an angry reply, but his cousin gripped him by the arm in token that he should not speak just then, and asked of Leander:

"Suppose we were willing to let you share with us so long as we are obliged to stay on

the island, how do we know that you'd play square?"

"We'll cross our throats on it!" Leander cried eagerly. "What's more, we'll do anythin' you want to show that we won't try to play any tricks. If you say the word, givin' us a show to sleep in the camp, an' our share of what you fellers have to eat, we'll do all the work, an' whatever else you ask of us."

"I thought you'd fixed up a camp of your own?" Frank cried.

"We did pile up a lot of brush; but it wouldn't keep us dry if a storm came up, same as is threatenin' now. Jest give us a chance to live with you peaceably, and we'll catch fish, chop wood, or do whatever you want."

Although Frank might not have admitted as much at the time, he understood full well that it would be to the advantage of himself and his cousin, if they counted on getting any sport from camping out, to make some kind of a bargain with Leander and Bill while they were in a penitent mood. It was nothing less than foolishness to spend all their time guarding the camp against these boys, who, if their

proposition was rejected, would, as a matter of course, bend all their energies to working mischief, whereas, in case a truce was agreed upon until all could gain the mainland, much in the way of pleasure might yet be gained.

"What do you say about it, Frank?" Ruel asked of his cousin, and the latter replied irritably:

"Do whatever you please, though it goes mightily against the grain to take these fellows in as chums after they've done everything they can against us."

"We wouldn't make chums of them. If they camped with us, it would be a question of holding them at a distance, and it will save us the trouble of being constantly on guard against them."

"I'll be satisfied with whatever you do, though I would like to thump Leander once, until he had enough of trying to raise a row," Frank said curtly, as he turned away, thus showing that he would take no further part in the conference.

"Leander has come way down off his high hoss," Hot Morgan said in a low but triumphant tone when Frank came over to where

he stood. "I never would have believed he could eat so much humble pie, an' from this out I'm allowin' he can't bully us fellers in the village same's he's always done."

Meanwhile Leander and Bill were waiting in all meekness to learn if the city boys would agree to make some kind of a bargain, and it was a full minute before Ruel gave them any satisfaction.

Then he said, speaking slowly, as if weighing every word:

"I'm not willing to make any trade until after hearing what the other members of our party, even including Hot Morgan, have to say about it. If you fellows will come up somewhere near the camp, we'll talk the matter over among ourselves, and let you know what may be agreed on."

"Shall we go there now?" Leander asked meekly.

"Wait till we fill the kettle and bucket with water, for that's what we came after, and then we'll be ready to hold a consultation."

"Give me the bucket," Bill cried, as he advanced to take it from Ruel's hands. "We'll carry the kettle, too, an' bring 'em both down

filled with water from the spring, for it's colder than what you get out of the lake, that's sure."

"Well, I'd never believed Leander an' Bill would do quite so much beggin'," Horace Morgan said, as the country boys ran off at full speed toward the spring. "If the fellers in the village don't rough inter him after we get back, I'm way out of my reckonin'. He's allers tellin' 'bout what he can do when it comes to fightin', an' here he is luggin' water meek as Moses, when he allowed he could do both of you up in great shape with one hand tied behind his back!"

"If you village boys had had courage enough to stand up to him like decent fellows, he would never have been able to play the bully as he has," Ruel said with a laugh, for he was feeling decidedly more comfortable in mind now there was a prospect that the warfare had come to an end. "We'll go up to the camp, where we can talk the matter over with Larry, and I'm hoping that everything will be fixed so we can have a little sport here on the island, even though it isn't possible to get very much to eat."

"Larry will be bold as a lion just as soon as he learns that 'Lander's gang' has surrendered, and claim that he could have whipped both of them single handed if we had given him the chance," and Frank laughed long and loud as he pictured in his mind the cowardly Larry suddenly grown brave.

When the boys arrived at the camp and knocked for admittance, Larry cried from within, still keeping the door bolted:

"Are you sure Lander an' Bill ain't sneakin' 'round waitin' for a chance to jump down on us? I saw 'em a minute ago kitin' up through the bushes with the bucket an' kettle, so I knowed they'd got the best of you fellers agin."

"Open the door!" Frank cried impatiently, as he kicked at the frail barrier with no gentle force.

"You fellers look around first, so's to see where Leander is, 'cause I ain't countin' on havin' him in here ragin' 'round, jest 'bout the same as killin' everybody!"

"Are you still afraid of Leander?" Frank asked, and Larry replied sharply:

"Yes, I'm willin' to agree I am, an' I reckon you fellers ain't feelin' much different since he took away the kettle an' bucket, eh? Now how can we boil potatoes, or lug any water? They've got us on the hip, an' the sooner you try to make some dicker with 'em, so's we can keep ourselves from starvin', the better it'll be all around."

"Are you ready to give in to whatever Leander may want done?" and Frank had great difficulty in repressing his mirth.

"Of course I am," Larry replied, decidedly. "There's no other way out of it, 'less you're willin' to starve."

"All right. Open the door and we'll decide what kind of a bargain can be made with these fellows."

"I thought you'd come to your senses after a while, though you fellers was a mighty long while findin' out that it ain't safe to run up against Lander," Larry said as he opened the door cautiously. "Was there much of a row when he took the bucket away from you? I'm ——"

He ceased speaking very suddenly, for at that instant Leander and Bill appeared from

amid the bushes, and with a loud cry of fear Larry slammed the door shut, leaving his comrades on the outside to receive the brunt of the supposed attack.

CHAPTER XV

A CONSULTATION

WHEN Larry fled in such haste, Hot Morgan, counting, perhaps, on adding to Larry's fears, ran hurriedly around the outside of the shanty to the kitchen window.

The shutter was open, and, while Larry was crawling under one of the bunks, Hot crept through the window.

"Don't open that door!" Larry cried, but before he ceased speaking Hot Morgan had opened the door, giving entrance to Ruel and Frank.

"Why don't you shut that door?" Larry howled. "Do you want them fellers to clean out the whole place?"

"How would you like it if we should make some trade with the gang, so they wouldn't make it so hot for us?" Frank asked, determined to lead Larry on until he had fully confessed his cowardice.

"If you only could!" Larry cried fervently.

"Anything would be better than to let them run all over us!"

"Well, we came here so you might have a voice in the consultation," Frank continued gravely. "Leander and Bill have offered to make a trade, and the question is, whether we shall give in to them? What do you say?"

"If they're willin' to let us alone, I'd agree to give the whole camp up to 'em!"

"With everything that is in it?"

"Sure. They're certain to get us in a tight place before a great while, 'less we can buy 'em off!"

"There is no sense in keeping up that kind of sport, Frank," Ruel interrupted. "I did think possibly we might talk reasonably with Larry, but he is so afraid of Leander that he can't even speak of him without trembling. The question for us to settle is whether we are willing to do as those fellows propose?"

"Of course you'll do it!" Larry cried.

"The important matter to be settled," said Frank, "is whether they will keep their word. What do you think about it, Morgan?"

"I believe you can trust 'em," Hot replied. "When Leander comes down off his high hoss

same's he did a while ago, you won't be far out of the way in believin' all he says."

Larry had partially crawled from beneath the bunk, intending, no doubt, to demand that his companions agree to any terms Leander might have imposed, but he now sat bolt upright, in speechless surprise.

"He is surely humble enough, when both he and Bill are willing to bring water for us. They didn't lose any time at it, either," and Frank laughed as he thought of the very decided change which had come over the bullies. "Look at them, waiting there patiently to learn if we are ready to make a bargain!"

Larry was on his feet by this time, and as Frank thus called attention to the boys outside, his eyes followed the direction indicated by the city boy's outstretched hand.

There, not twenty feet from the camp, he could see those of whom he stood in such abject fear, seated on the ground with the vessels of water near at hand, and even he could understand that the country boys had not come with any evil intent.

"What are they waitin' for?" he asked in a tremulous voice, and Hot replied, as if it

gave him great pleasure to impart the information:

"They agree to do whatever these fellows say, if we'll let 'em bunk in here with us. Leander is down an' out. He's willin' to say that they've acted mighty mean."

This information, together with what could be seen from the window, was enough to convince Larry that there had been a decided change in the situation since he last ventured outside. While one might have counted twenty he remained silently looking out at the repentant bullies, and then, satisfied that there was no longer any danger to himself, he suddenly found his courage.

"They can't come inter this camp, not while I'm here!" he cried, in a tone sufficiently loud for the country boys to hear. "I'll show 'em what it means to raise sich a row as they've started."

"Go right out and talk to them," Ruel said as he opened the door. "Five minutes ago you were begging that we make any kind of a trade, and now you want to flog them both. Do it now, so we may have it over."

But in an instant Larry had important

business in the kitchen, and he did not venture out again until the matter under discussion had been finally settled.

"There is no reason why we should give Larry any voice in this affair, for there are times when he hasn't common sense," Ruel said, turning to his cousin. "If you and Hot are agreed, we may as well close the bargain."

"I'm ready to agree to whatever you think best," Frank replied, and Hot added:

"It don't jest seem as if I had the right to say anythin', after all that's been done on this island; but I'd like to see Leander an' Bill settled down here, if you fellers are willin'."

Ruel opened the door, and as the repentant bullies looked up eagerly, he said quietly:

"It is agreed that you may share what we have, and the understanding is that you shall do a fair share of the work. There must be no quarreling or threatening; but we are to live together as peaceably as may be, until it is possible to leave the island."

"We'll keep to our part of the trade, an' don't you forget it," Leander replied as he

came into the camp bringing the pail of water, with Bill following close behind and staggering under the weight of the kettle. "Is there anything you want us to do to-night?"

"Feeling pretty empty in the stomach, I reckon?" Frank said in a friendly tone, and Leander replied emphatically:

"That's what we are, for a fact."

"If you'll try your hand at fishing we'll have another supper before going to bed. We'll carry the logs for the raft down to the shore and see what kind of luck you'll have."

Half an hour later a stranger would never have suspected, from the general appearance of affairs, that there had been any enmity between the members of the party. Even Larry, who did not dare to show any displeasure, fearing lest Leander or Bill might serve him out in private, acted a most friendly part and all worked together in apparently the most perfect harmony.

Leander suggested that, since there was no longer any reason why the raft should be taken apart each time after being used, it be built more substantially and of sufficient size

to carry two, and while this was being done Hot Morgan explained how he believed it would be possible to gain the mainland without very much of danger.

It was nearly sunset before Leander had enlarged the raft to his satisfaction, but, since this was the best time for fishing, no one found fault because of the delay.

Bill Dean had gathered an ample supply of bait, and within a quarter hour after the newly-made raft had been launched the country boys had a supply of perch sufficient to satisfy the hunger of a much larger party than was on Indian Island.

Again Hot Morgan acted as cook, but this time Larry condescended to aid him in every possible way, as if he was eager to please the redoubtable Leander, even though that young man had, for the time being, ceased to play the bully.

When the second supper had been cooked and eaten, the candles lighted, the camp set to rights and the boys were lounging about, each after his own pleasure, Frank said in a tone of satisfaction, addressing himself to no one in particular:

"Say, this is what I call something like! It's a lot better than one crowd trying to get the best of the other and nobody having any fun. This promises to be sport, and so long as the supply of salt pork holds out we needn't be afraid of going hungry."

"I wish we could have started in like this at the beginnin'," Leander added with a long-drawn sigh. "It wouldn't have done any good for us to make an offer then to you fellers."

"I'm not so certain about that," Ruel replied thoughtfully. "Of course, we were warm under the collar because you had run off the canoe, but when we found that you couldn't get away from the island until we did I'm of the opinion that we'd have been glad to have made this same trade. And Larry would have been spared considerable suffering."

"You can't tell us anythin' 'bout Larry that we don't know already," said Leander; "when he starts in gettin' scared he makes a mighty good job of it. But, say, didn't you fellers count on buildin' a raft so's to sail across to the village? You intended to leave the island, didn't you?"

"Not after we saw what sort of luck you had," Ruel replied. "Not so many hours ago Morgan proposed a plan which I believe might be worked, if we were so very keen to get away."

Then Ruel explained the plan that Hot had suggested, and Leander said emphatically:

"There ain't the least little bit of a reason why it couldn't be done, if a feller started when the wind was fair. I'd like to have a try at it, an' I will, too, if you'll agree, an' help me get under way."

Larry was the only one of the party who welcomed the proposition. Frank looked doubtfully at Ruel, who finally said, hesitatingly:

"I'm not so certain that I'm in any hurry to get away. It may be that we'll soon grow tired of fried fish, and want something in the way of bread; but till that time comes it will suit me to stay where we are, now matters have been fixed comfortably. I believe we will have some fun."

"Do you mean that you'd be willin' to have Bill an' me stay, too?" Leander asked in surprise, and Frank replied laughingly:

"Why not? We've been having quite a bit of a row, but it's done with now, and there's no reason why all of us can't enjoy ourselves. It'll be a case of dividing the work, so that neither fellow will be called on to hurt himself by too much labor. I guess nobody will suffer."

"I wish me an' Bill never had cooked up any job to run off your boat," Leander said with a sigh, and Master Dean added emphatically:

"Me, too! We certainly have stirred up a lot of unnecessary trouble."

"Look here," Ruel cried cheerily, "we're fixed too snug just now to chew over old differences. Let's turn to and get all the fun that's coming to us ——"

"I'll go over to the village before to-morrow night, if the wind turns right, an' we'll have grub enough to see us through in great shape," Leander cried, and he would have gone down to the shore then, although it was too dark to see anything very clearly, in order to lay his plans for the venture, but for the fact that just at the moment a gust of rain swept in through the open window.

"My," said Bill Dean, "just look at that. I knew we were in for a good old spell of rough weather."

"I'm afraid you'll have to stay where you are for a while," Ruel said, as Frank partially closed the shutter, "and it may be we shall be hungry for fish, instead of getting tired of them, before the storm clears away."

"I reckon we'll get quite a bit of rain," Leander added, as he gazed out into the darkness with the air of a weather prophet, "but you needn't worry 'bout fish. Me an' Bill will look after that part of the business, no matter how hard it storms."

"Who'll lug the water?" Larry piped up, thinking that now was the proper time to have it understood that the tamed bullies should perform the lion's share of the labor of the camp.

"You haven't done anything much since we landed here, so I think that part of the work belongs to you," Ruel said decidedly. "Morgan shall be the cook; Bill and Leander are to act as fishermen and Frank and I will see to the fuel supply."

"Have I got to lug water for all hands?" Larry asked in a tone of discontent, and Frank cried cheerily, but at the same time with a note of decision:

"You will if you count on having anything to eat. With all hands turning to it's a case of doing your share of the work or going hungry."

"Larry'll lug the water all right, an' won't do any more'n his fair share of loafin'," Leander said in such a meaning tone that Larry was reduced to silence on the instant, for he understood that even though the leader of the village boys had surrendered he was not wholly subdued.

Until it was time to roll into the bunks, and all hands were more than willing to retire early, Leander laid his plans for the raft building, declaring that it would not be very difficult to make the voyage across the lake, and before they closed their eyes that night the city as well as the country boys believed that communication with the mainland was much the same as established already.

The pattering of rain on the roof and against the sides of the camp lulled the weary boys to

rest very shortly after they were stretched at full length in the bunks, and for the first time since Elish had taken his departure peace reigned on Indian Island.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STORM

THE campers did not awake until a late hour on the morning after the boys had made a treaty of peace, and it is quite possible that the pattering of the rain caused them to sleep much longer than would have been the case under other circumstances.

It was Leander who first aroused to consciousness, and he cried in a cheery tone as he threw open the shutter, thereby getting a regular shower bath, for the wind blew the rain through the window in sufficient quantity to wet him thoroughly :

"It's time for you fellers to turn out, I reckon, an' yet I don't know as you can do anything better than sleep while the rain is comin' down by buckets full. Seems though it might be nine or ten o'clock, but it's hard to tell, without the sun."

Ruel was on his feet in an instant, and there was no need for him to look out of the

window in order to learn if it was storming, for the rain beat against the roof and sides of the shanty in a manner that told how severe a gale had swept over the lake during the night.

"I'm afraid we'll go hungry this day," he said grimly, and added, as his glance fell on the small amount of fuel which had been brought inside the camp the evening previous, "It doesn't look as if we could do very much in the way of cooking, even though we had all the fish in the lake, for we can't get dry wood."

"Get back in the bunk for an hour, while Bill an' I show you fellers what can be done," Leander said as he stripped off everything in the way of clothing except his trousers.

"Say, you're not foolish enough to go outside while it's pouring like this?" Frank asked lazily, raising himself on his elbow to look at the fuel supply.

"Some one must get a move on, an' seein's how we're to blame because there isn't anythin' on hand to eat, I'm allowin' that Bill an' me are the ones who've got to hustle," Leander replied cheerily.

"But you'll be soaked in less than five minutes after you put your nose out-of-doors," Frank objected, and Bill Dean said with a laugh, as he also stripped off the greater portion of his clothing:

"I reckon the water won't get through our skins, an' we'll wear so little that it won't take very long to dry what's soaked. Say, Hot, if you're the cook start a fire with this dry wood, so the wet stuff we bring in will just have to burn. See to the fishin', Leander, an' I'll swing the ax for a spell."

"We won't hug the camp while you fellows are at work," Ruel said decidedly, as he began briskly to follow Leander's example by stripping to the skin; but Bill stopped him by saying:

"There's no reason why more than two should get a duckin'. Stay where you are till we get back, an' perhaps your turn will come later, for the wind howls as if we was goin' to get a long spell of bad weather."

Bill had hardly more than ceased speaking when he and Leander had darted outside, finding it difficult to close the door behind them because of the wind.

Larry Duffield was the only member of the party who appeared to think it better to remain in the bunk, and he closed his eyes contentedly when Hot began building a fire, but Frank had no intention of allowing the indolent lad to take his ease.

"Turn out, Larry, and do your share of the work!" he cried, laughingly. "The cook is the only one who can hug the camp this morning, and if you don't have a supply of fresh water on hand you'll go hungry, that's sure."

Then Frank ran out of the door, followed closely by Ruel, and Larry's wrath was so great that he failed to find words sufficiently strong in which to express his anger and disgust.

"What's the use for them to make fools of theirselves jest 'cause they come from the city?" he cried, angrily. "I'll have him understand that I don't go outdoors this day, water or no water! There's no sense in all hands gettin' wet!"

"I'd do as they say, seein's how things have come 'round in a way to make it kinder jolly for all hands," Hot Morgan said in a friendly

tone. "Me an' you haven't shown up very well in this 'ere business, an' the best thing we can do is to plug right at whatever comes our way from this out."

"I won't get the water while it's rainin' to beat the band," Larry replied in a tone of decision, and straightway he rolled over as if intending to take another nap.

Hot continued his work over the stove, as if having no doubt but that Leander would bring in a supply of fish, and, ten minutes later, Ruel and Frank returned, each staggering under a heavy burden of fuel, not very dry, to be sure, but yet a good deal better than nothing.

"Hello, ain't you out yet?" Frank asked as he piled his share of wood behind the stove where it would be exposed to the heat. "We'll be needing water mighty soon, and if you don't have it here I promise that you shan't have a bite to eat this day."

Then he and Ruel went out into the storm again, and Larry slowly crept from the bunk, saying meanwhile to Hot:

"I'll go after the water rather'n have a row jest now, but you wait a spell, an' see if I

don't give them city fellers a jar! They ain't goin' to boss me 'round just like I was their slave!"

When Larry came back from the spring, the water running in tiny streams from every angle of his garments, for he had refused to take off any of his clothing, Leander entered with half a dozen big perch.

"I guess there's enough for all of us. Yell for me when breakfast is ready."

"Where are you goin'?" Hot asked when Leander Leighton turned as if to leave the shanty.

"Down to fix up the raft. The wind is fair for a trip over to the village, an' it strikes me I can't do any better than get off after breakfast. Of course I'll have to swim part of the way, so I won't get much wetter than if I waited till the sun shines, with a chance that the breeze may die away entirely by that time."

Hot busied himself with cleaning the fish. Larry, sulky and wet, crept behind the stove with the air of a martyr drying his clothes, and a full half hour passed in silence, save for the noise made by the cook as he bustled about.

"THERE'S ENOUGH FOR ALL OF US"

Because the other boys had not come in with more fuel it was reasonable to suppose they had gone to help Leander, and Hot said when the perch were done nearly to a turn :

"I reckon all hands are at work on the raft, an' even though it is stormin' mighty bad, Leander ain't far outer the way when he counts on makin' the trip while the wind's blowin' strong. Jest stick your head through the door an' yell for 'em to come to breakfast, will yer?"

"No, I won't!" Larry cried, explosively. "They can starve to death for all I care. I'm sick of this whole crowd, an' you bet I don't stay on this bloomin' old island a single minute longer'n I have to!"

"Why don't you go on the raft with Leander?" Hot asked quietly. "He won't have much trouble in gettin' across while this wind blows, an' you can be home in time for dinner."

"I'll go when I get good an' ready, an' you needn't try to drive me a little bit, 'cause I'm through slavin' my life out for you fellers!" and Larry crept yet further behind the hot stove.

When it was possible for him to leave the fish without danger that they would be scorched, Hot went to the door and yelled at the full strength of his lungs the information that breakfast was ready, after which he began putting the fried fish and salt pork on the table, saying half to himself as he did so:

"I don't count on bein' any great shakes as a cook; but I would like to have enough to work with jest once, so's to show what I could do."

In answer to the summons of the cook, the boys came into the shanty wet and hungry, but in the best of spirits, and the odor of fried fish was so grateful that straightway all hands, save the fellow behind the stove, felt that Master Morgan was not only doing more than his share of the work, but performing it in a most satisfactory manner.

No one gave any heed to the sulky lad behind the stove.

All hands helped themselves so liberally to the appetizing food before them, that Larry soon began to fear there would be none left for him.

It was not pleasant to come out without

some word from one of the lads at the table, for it had much the appearance of his having been beaten at his own game; but he did not dare delay longer. He emerged from his sulking place looking decidedly foolish, and Leander cried with a laugh:

"Hello! Where'd you come from? I'd kinder made up my mind that you didn't want to have any more truck at all with us fellers."

"That's jest the way I'm feelin'," Larry replied sharply, and then he pushed forward his plate for a portion of the fish.

The cook helped him liberally, but in silence, and from that moment until the meal was at an end no one gave any heed to him.

From the conversation, he understood that the party had been very successful in finding such timbers as would be needed for the raft, and Leander was eager to set out on his journey while the wind was blowing so strong.

As soon as he had finished his breakfast, Ruel wrote a short letter to his father, and said as he gave it to Leander:

"There is no need for you to tell that we've been having any trouble. If you're asked

about matters here, say we're gettin' along in great shape, and count on staying a week longer at the very least."

"How do you know but I want to go home this minute?" Larry asked sharply.

"There is nothin' to stop you from goin' with me, if you're achin' to get away," Leander replied. "Or, if you wait till I come back with a boat, one of us can set across any time."

"Better go with Leander, an' then you won't get all used up luggin' water," Bill Dean suggested. "When Hot begins to wash the dishes he'll use a lot of it."

Larry made no reply to this suggestion, and the cook asked Leander how soon he counted on starting.

"I'll be off in less'n half an hour, an' if the storm holds bad like it is now, the wind oughter send me across flyin'. I did allow that I'd have to swim a good bit; but 'cordin' to the looks of things now, there won't be any need of it. If you fellers want to see me leave the dock, you'd better be stirrin' your stumps, 'cause I shan't hang 'round a great while after we get the bushes made fast."

Then Leander, making a small bundle of

his clothing, set off with it under his arm, the others following close behind, while Larry remained at the table looking thoroughly displeased with the whole proceeding. He wanted to see the beginning of the voyage, and at the same time felt that, because his father owned Indian Island, he was of so much importance that some especial attention, such as inviting him to witness the launching of the raft, should be paid him.

However, he would miss it all if he remained there waiting for his companions to urge him, and still feeling as sulky as he looked, Larry walked slowly through the driving rain in the direction of the shore, from which could be heard the sound of voices.

Had he delayed five minutes longer the voyage would have been begun in his absence. Already Leander was making ready to push off from the shore, and the raft surely looked fit for the journey.

It was sufficiently large to ride over the waves even with Leander's weight on it, and each timber had been securely lashed with vines.

Two thick bushes had been set up at one

end, to serve as sails, and amid the branches of these Leander had tied his bundle of clothing, that he might be able to present himself at Mr. Duffield's boarding-house in a suitable costume. He also had made himself a rough paddle.

"She'll go all right, an' there ain't the least little fear but I'll be across in less'n an hour," Leander said to his companions. "Sure you don't want Elish to come over after yer right away?"

"I have told father in the letter that we count on staying as long as he is willing, so Elish needn't come until we send for him," Ruel replied, and Larry could not resist the opportunity of saying something disagreeable.

"Tell father that I want to come home jest as quick as he can start a boat after me," he cried. "I've had all I want of this crowd, an' count on leavin' the minute I can get away."

"All right, I'll bring over both boats, an' then you can go without waitin' for Elish," Leander replied as he waded out to where Bill Dean was holding the raft away from the rocks, and an instant later the voyage was begun.

CHAPTER XVII

THE VOYAGE

IMMEDIATELY Bill Dean released his hold on the raft, she drifted off before the wind far more swiftly than her builders had believed would be possible.

The bushes at the end of the timbers acted admirably as a sail, and the wind was so strong that, as Hot Morgan said, she "reg'larly flew" over the water, while Leander crouched at what might have been called the stern, waving his hand triumphantly.

"What did I tell yer?" he shouted. "She'll go across in a good deal less'n an hour, an' you fellers can look to see me back 'bout noon, that is," he added as a disagreeable thought occurred to him, "if my folks don't say I shan't leave."

"It never came into my head that he mightn't be allowed to come back," Ruel said ruefully. "Either Frank or I should have

gone, for we may never have so good a chance to get across, after this storm has died away."

"If he don't come he'll send Elish over with the canoe, so you'll get what grub you need, an' Larry'll have a chance to go right back, same's he's achin' to do," Bill Dean replied confidently, and Larry scowled, as if his companions were meditating some treachery against him.

"I'll make it mighty hot for you fellers when I do get there," he cried with a threatening gesture, but retreated to a safe distance immediately Bill Dean went toward him and Ruel said sharply :

"You won't do anything of the kind, Larry Duffield, else you'll settle with Frank and me in a way that won't be pleasant. We've straightened all this thing out, and don't intend that there shall be any more of a snarl to it."

"Don't bother 'bout anythin' Larry says. He'll be as good as pie the next time he sees me in the village," came from the raft, and Larry actually trembled, for he understood that the redoubtable Leander had heard the

threat, which might have disagreeable consequences for him.

He retreated behind a clump of bushes, as if believing that by thus hiding himself he was out of danger, and the other lads gave no further heed to him because they were all intent on watching the steady progress of the raft.

The clumsy craft was making very good weather of it, now that her sail of fir bushes had brought one end around into the wind, and Leander appeared to have but little trouble in steering.

"If it wasn't rainin', he'd go over without wettin' a hair," Bill Dean announced confidently. "I'm sorry now I didn't go with him."

"Why?" Frank asked in surprise.

"Because it won't be any fool of a job for him to row back against this wind, 'specially if he tows the canoe so's to give Larry a chance to get home quick."

This latter portion of the voyage was something to which the lads had given no thought, and, now that it was brought to their attention, all began to feel uncomfortable in mind,

showing the anxiety so plainly on their faces that Bill said with a laugh :

"I can't see that you need look so done up 'bout it. He's certain to come some time, an' I reckon the perch'll keep right on bitin' whether he's here or not. What say to goin' up to the camp? It won't do any harm if we get dried out a bit, an' I feel as if I'd been in soak about a week."

Ruel lingered to watch Leander a few moments longer; but that young voyager was getting on so well, and making such good headway, that it seemed really foolish to remain longer in the storm, therefore he started toward the camp, saying as he overtook Bill Dean :

"I'm sorry we didn't think that he may have a hard time getting back, for one of us might have gone with him just as well as not."

"I wouldn't worry 'bout it, 'cause I don't allow that Leander is fussin' any," and Bill apparently put the matter from his mind as he turned all his attention to "drying out."

Larry followed his companions into the

camp, and insisted on having an equal chance to absorb heat from the stove; but he had by no means recovered from his fit of sulks, and neither of the others appeared to think it necessary to make any attempt at soothing his ruffled spirits.

Seeming to be disappointed because little or no attention was paid to him, he announced very emphatically that it was his intention to go home as soon as Leander came back to the island.

"I think that is the very best thing to do," said Ruel calmly.

"S'posen I go, what'll you fellers do?" Larry asked sharply, and Frank replied with a laugh:

"I reckon we'll get along after a fashion. At least we shall make a big try at it; but don't fret yourself about us. Have a good time in the village, and you can keep in your mind the fact that it won't be necessary to wear your life out lugging water."

"He'll have a good deal more'n that to do, when he gets where the summer boarders are," Bill Dean said confidently, and from the expression which came over Larry's face, it

was evident that he was thoroughly well aware of this fact.

Indeed, he had already told the city boys that he was having "a snap," in thus being hired to look after them, and his companions felt certain he would never leave Indian Island while the others remained, therefore his threat to return to the village did not trouble them greatly.

As a matter of course, the chief topic of conversation was regarding Leander's voyage, and the probable length of time it would require. That he would gain the village without mishap all believed, and the only matter which caused any anxiety was as to whether it would be possible for him to pull a boat against the strong wind, as must be done if he came back before the storm abated.

When Larry was comfortably warm, he laid down in one of the bunks; but the other lads spent their time making the camp more homelike, for little or nothing had been done in the way of improving the general appearance of the inside, because of the trouble with Leander and his following.

Hot Morgan set about getting dinner, doing

the work in a leisurely manner, and evidently counting on showing what it was possible for him to do in the line of cookery when he tried.

The noonday meal was eaten rather early in the forenoon, because it was ready, and also because there was nothing else to occupy their attention. Then all hands, with the exception of Larry, who betook himself to his bunk as soon as he had finished dinner, helped the cook set the camp to rights, after which it was a case of lounging around discussing the probable whereabouts of Leander.

The storm showed no signs of clearing away, and when the afternoon was about half spent Bill Dean announced as his firm belief that they would have no visitors before the next day.

"Lander counts on towin' your canoe back, an' he won't be able to tackle the job in a gale like this."

Ruel and Frank were of much the same opinion. Nevertheless, one or another ventured out now and then during the afternoon to gaze over the lake in the direction of the

village, but at nightfall no craft was anywhere in sight.

"He'll be here before to-morrow noon," Ruel said as he came in from the shore, when it was no longer possible to see very far across the water because of the darkness. "We may as well have supper, and then go to bed, in order to be out bright and early in the morning."

To this the others agreed, with the exception of Larry, who was so deep in the sulks that it did not seem possible for him to speak to any one.

Another meal of fried fish; a general clearing up of the camp, and then all hands stretched themselves out for a long rest, with the belief that before another night had come the bill of fare would be made up of something other than fish and salt pork.

One would have supposed that Larry, after sleeping the greater portion of the day, would have been wakeful; yet he closed his eyes as quickly as did any of the others, and it seemed as if the night must have nearly passed when the occupants of the camp were suddenly aroused to wakefulness by a vigorous pounding on the door.

During half a minute or more all hands remained silent, not understanding the cause of the uproar, and then Bill Dean sprang from his bunk, as he cried gleefully:

"It's Lander! He must have been rowin' pretty nigh all night, an' I'm allowin' he's tired."

"That's what I am," Leander said emphatically, for Bill had opened the door even as he spoke.

"Why didn't you wait till the storm had cleared away?" Ruel asked, and Leander replied with a laugh as he entered the house literally staggering under the weight of two huge baskets:

"When I'd got all this stuff together, it kinder struck me that you fellers was needin' somethin' more'n fried fish, an' it couldn't be brought any too quick. I pulled up under the lee of the other shore a long bit, an' then struck across, so it wasn't sich a terrible pull, though that canoe did hang back in great shape."

"When did you leave the village?" Bill Dean asked as he began to build a fire, for the water was running from every angle of Lean-

der's garments in a way that told he must be drenched to the skin.

"I started jest about sunset. Elish said I couldn't make it while the wind was hummin' the way it is now; but it seems a good deal as if I had, though I'm reckonin' it's near to midnight."

"I thought it must be almost morning, for it seems as if I had slept a very long while," and Ruel began overhauling the provisions to find coffee or tea in order that Leander might have something warm to drink.

Before he had found either Larry jumped out of the bunk, pulling the basket from his hands, as he asked of Leander:

"Did mother make any row 'bout sendin' me all this stuff?"

"Nothin' to speak of, since you can't rightly say she sent it to you."

"Of course she did, 'cause she wouldn't been packin' up a lot of things for you fellers. After I see what there is here, I'll tell you what we can have to eat," and Larry carried the basket to his bunk.

"Now don't be quite so fast!" Leander said sharply as he took the food, replacing it on

the table. "As near as I can figger out, not the least little bit of that stuff belongs to you, Larry ——"

"What's the reason it don't, if mother sent it?" Larry asked angrily.

"She asked me when you was comin' home, an' I told her what you said 'bout startin' the minute I got here, so she allowed there wasn't need of anythin' for you. Besides, 'cordin' to her talk, she didn't have much stuff cooked up, so the city fellers' fathers went down to Baker's shop an' bought the biggest lot of stuff you ever saw. What's in these baskets ain't more'n half of it; the rest is in the boat, an' we can bring it up in the mornin'. My mother gave me three loaves of bread, an' if we should stay here two weeks we couldn't eat all I've brought."

Larry stood gazing at Leander irresolutely while one might have counted thirty, and then, turning slowly, went back to the bunk.

"What did father say about our staying a while longer?" Ruel asked.

"He asked if you was havin' a good time, an' when I told him what you'd said 'bout stayin' as long as the grub held out, he an' the

other man bought pretty nigh everythin' Baker had on hand, so it looks as if they counted you could stop here quite a spell. Why, you fellers have got the greatest layout I ever saw—sardines, canned tongue, peaches—well say, I couldn't begin to tell you all I've got. There's coffee in the basket, an' some canned milk, so if Hot will get me 'bout a pint of it mixed up, steamin' hot, I reckon I'll feel better."

"Then you brought both boats?" Hot Morgan said questioningly as he set about making coffee.

"Sure. Didn't Larry say he'd have to go home the minute I got back? I jest had to bring both the boats, else what would he have done?"

"I want you fellers to understand right here that you ain't goin' to drive me off this island till I get good an' ready to go!" Larry shouted in a rage, and Frank cried as if in profound surprise:

"I thought you wanted to go. That's what you said when Leander left."

"P'rhaps I do, an' p'rhaps I don't," Larry said sulkily as he turned his face toward the

wall. "If I wanter stay, I'm goin' to, an' that's all there is about it."

Surely it was foolish to discuss any matter with the country lad while he was in such an ill humor, and, recognizing this, his companions paid no further attention to him, until Hot Morgan had prepared a most appetizing supper, even though it might not be needed, for a glimpse of the dainties in the baskets aroused his desire to give further evidence of his skill in cooking.

When the food was on the table, and there was at least four times more than they could have eaten had it been fast day with them since Leander set off on his voyage, Larry came out of the bunk, seating himself before the bountiful supply without regard to any one else, and during twenty minutes or more he worked most industriously, helping himself to everything in sight.

Then it was that Leander, having refreshed himself with two steaming cups of coffee, said much as though thinking aloud:

"It's mighty lucky for the rest of us, Larry Duffield, that your mother couldn't send any of this stuff, else I'm allowin' you'd done your

best toward makin' some of us go hungry. I'm noticin', though, that you ain't at all bashful 'bout pitchin' inter grub that belongs to some other feller."

CHAPTER XVIII

LARRY'S QUANDARY

SURELY it seemed to Larry as if matters had gone sadly awry since the day when he was regularly hired to "look after" the city boys.

He had counted on taking entire charge of matters, believing they were so "green" in the sport of camping out that it would be absolutely necessary for him to direct every movement, with the result that he could throw all the work on them without knowledge on their part that he was in any degree unfair.

Then had come the encounter with Leander and his friends, when Larry would have sacrificed everything he or his companions owned rather than take what seemed like the dangerous chance of standing up for his own rights, and these same city fellows had straightened out matters in a wonderfully short space of time, at the same time performing the remarkable feat of taming the redoubtable Leander.

Now that peace had been declared, and the city boys were apparently good friends with their late enemies, it surely seemed as if Larry was an outsider, and, although he might not have been willing to admit the fact, right down in the bottom of his heart he knew it was all owing to his own folly.

Larry realized that he had been very foolish in declaring it as his intention to return home at the earliest opportunity.

He didn't want to go home, but had made the statement intending it as a threat, foolishly believing the city boys would try to alter his decision.

Instead of doing anything of the kind, they had been so cruel as to agree that it would be a good idea, and, as if to make the situation more intolerable, Leander had brought to the island such a collection of dainties from the Baker shop as made Larry's mouth water. Besides, he knew full well that once at home he would be kept busy with this task or that, never being allowed an idle moment, and there was no question but that work and Larry Duffield were bitter enemies.

As if all this was not enough to fill his cup

of bitterness to the brim, Leander had repeated at his home the threat Larry so foolishly made, and the consequence was that he not only had no share in the tempting store of food, but his mother would be expecting him home on the morrow; and, if he failed to come, it was not unreasonable to believe Elish would be sent in search for him.

Therefore when he had finished his share of the supper he pushed back his chair angrily, and went straight to bed, with, apparently, never a thought that it might be the proper thing for him to aid in clearing away the dishes after the very palatable feast.

He might have offered to help, however, and been none the worse, so far as being called upon to do any work was concerned, for when Ruel and Frank proposed to help wash the dishes Hot Morgan stoutly refused any assistance.

"I'll clear them away to-night, an' wash 'em in the mornin'," he said as he began the task. "This is the cook's business, an' I'm countin' on gettin' away with what belongs to the job, without callin' on any of you fellers."

Leander and Bill seemed to think this the proper thing for Hot to do, and without making any protest, crawled into their bunks, Ruel and Frank following the example after seeing that the cook was really eager to work unaided.

Half an hour later silence reigned in the camp, save for the heavy breathing of the sleepers, and the only one who remained awake was Larry.

He twisted and turned while trying to decide how it might be possible to avoid leaving the island when another day had come; but, rack his brains as he would, no plausible scheme presented itself.

Leander was the first to awaken next morning, and the sun had already been looking across the water toward Indian Island a full hour, when he opened the door to fill his lungs with fresh air.

The noise, slight though it was, aroused the others, and Hot Morgan said as he leaped out of the bunk with a clatter that would have awakened the soundest sleeper:

"If you fellers will bring up the rest of the stuff from the boat, I'll get about washin' the

dishes. I'm sorry that I didn't do it last night."

"Better cook breakfast for Larry the first thing you do," Leander said with a laugh. "He'll be wantin' to get off early, before the breeze springs up, an' the rest of us can wait, seein's we had sich a late supper last night."

Larry was in the act of getting out of bed, when Leander spoke, and he paused on the edge of the bunk to say angrily:

"I want you fellers to understand that I've got the right to stay here jest as long as I like!"

"You said you was goin', an' Lander's told your folks, so I don't see how you'll get out of it," Bill Dean replied, looking as if surprised because Larry had spoken so heatedly, and there was an expression of such bitter disappointment on Larry's face, that Ruel said quickly:

"We don't want to drive you away, Larry. If you'd like to stay, and are willing to do your share of the work, without making so many threats that you know can't be carried out, settle down with the rest of us. If, how-

ever, you are bent on making yourself disagreeable, as you have been doing, it will be better for all hands if you go."

To this Larry made no reply; but when the other lads left the camp on their way to the shore, he followed sulkily behind, standing with his hands in his pockets while his companions unloaded the boat.

Surely Leander had brought a plentiful supply of provisions. The boat was literally loaded with canned food, vegetables, and, in fact, a general assortment of everything Mr. Baker kept on sale.

"One spell it looked like we might starve on this island," Bill Dean said when the cargo was piled up on the shore ready to be taken to camp. "But now it strikes me we're in danger of eatin' ourselves to death. I'm allowin' that would be the way you'd rather die, eh, Larry?"

But Larry preserved a sulky silence, and Leander asked, as he made a great pretense of putting the paddles in the canoe:

"Shall we shove her inter the water so's she'll be all ready when you have had your breakfast?"

"When I want to leave I'll tend to things without askin' you to help me," Larry said curtly, turning as if to retrace his steps; but Ruel checked him by saying:

"Take up a load of this stuff, if you're going to the camp. There's no reason why you should go empty-handed."

To the surprise of all the lads, Larry did as he was bid, and on arriving at the camp, still further astonished them by filling all the pails and kettles with water, although the cook had not suggested that it might be needed.

Bill Dean and Leander insisted on gathering the fuel, now that their services as fishermen were not needed, and the city boys did what they might toward aiding the cook stow away the provisions.

Thus it was that every one found something with which to occupy himself, with the result that when breakfast was ready all had such appetites as forced the cook to make many additions to the meal.

After breakfast all the party, except Hot Morgan and Larry, went into the open air in search of something which might afford

amusement, now that they no longer felt obliged to spend all the time hunting for food.

Ruel asked Larry to go with them; but that young gentleman refused curtly, and when he was alone with the cook, said in a tone of complaint:

"Them fellers think they can rough inter me all the time; but before we leave this island I'm goin' to show 'em that they're buckin' ag'in the wrong boy."

"What'll you do?" Hot asked with mild curiosity.

"I'm keepin' that part of it to myself."

"Look here, Larry," and Horace Morgan paused in his task of washing the dishes to speak impressively. "The trouble with you is that you wanter be the whole thing, an' ain't got backbone enough to carry off the play. What's the use moonin' 'round tellin' what you're goin' to do, or makin' out that you've got some big thing up your sleeve? Why, what came over Lander an' Bill? They saw it wasn't any use to strain theirselves tryin' to get ahead of the city fellers, so they turned to an' chummed in with 'em."

"That's 'cause they was afraid," Larry interrupted.

"Well, s'posin' it was? Wasn't you 'fraid of Lander, an' didn't you want to give him everything you had here, if he'd agree not to make a row? There's a chance for us to have the time of our lives, if we turn to an' act decent. Why not try it? You ain't gettin' any fun outer sulkin'."

"I'll do what I wanter, an' you fellers can't stop me. Jest wait a spell, an' you'll see somethin'. I'll make it mighty warm for this whole gang."

"Look out you don't get the biggest part of the heat," Hot Morgan said, laughingly, and Larry cried in a passion as he opened the door:

"I'll make the whole crowd of yer sick 'tween now an' night, an' don't you forget it!"

Then Larry walked stiffly out of the camp, and the cook was not sufficiently ruffled by his threats to make any effort to learn in which direction he went.

After the housework had been done Hot went in search of his companions and found

them on the shore near the boats making ready for a swimming match, and when Ruel asked for Larry the cook repeated the threat made by the lad.

"It's too bad he can't act decently," Frank said irritably; "but if he is bent on making an idiot of himself, the best plan is to let him have his own way. Perhaps he'll get tired of it after a while."

From that time until nearly noon the lads apparently gave no heed to Larry and his ill temper, and then, as they were walking toward the camp, Leander said with a laugh:

"We'll find Larry stowed away in one of the bunks, waitin' for dinner to be cooked."

To the surprise of all, the shanty was empty when they arrived, nor was there any token that it had been visited by Larry since the cook went to the shore.

Even then there was no great alarm felt because of his absence. It was believed he had gone into the thicket to indulge himself in a fit of ill temper; but when dinner was ready to serve, and Ruel had shouted himself hoarse without receiving any reply, the absence of Larry began to appear strange.

"When he doesn't show up at dinner time it comes mighty nigh bein' a sign that somethin's gone wrong," and Leander really looked anxious.

"P'rhaps he's gone home, same's he threatened," Hot Morgan suggested, and Bill Dean replied sharply:

"He couldn't have gone without a boat, an' we've been close by ours all the forenoon."

"Perhaps he waited until we had left the shore, and then started off in the canoe," Ruel said hurriedly as he ran out of the camp.

Within five minutes he had returned, looking far from comfortable in mind as he said:

"Both boats are where we left them. It is certain he hasn't been near there since we came away."

"If it wasn't that he's stayin' away at dinner time, I'd say he had gone off where there wouldn't be a show of bein' obliged to lug water," Leander said, half to himself. "At the same time I can't see how anythin' could have happened to him on this island, without our havin' heard somethin' 'bout it."

"Better get yer dinner while it's hot," said

the cook solicitously. "It's a bang up good one, an' there's no cause to let it spoil. I reckon he'll come back before we're through eatin'."

Ruel believed this to be good advice, and seated himself at the table in token that his comrades do the same; but, even though the meal was all the cook had claimed for it, no one enjoyed himself much because of the strange absence.

Although Larry had not proven an agreeable companion at camping out, the lads were seriously alarmed concerning him, and Ruel said when the dinner was brought to a hasty end:

"We must find out why he has stayed away so long. It won't take a great while to hunt the island over thoroughly, and we'll get about it at once."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SEARCH

Now that Larry was missing, the threat he had made, and to which Hot Morgan paid little or no attention at the time, seemed ominous to the anxious boys as they recalled the words.

He said that he "would make the whole crowd sick before night," and surely he had succeeded better than, perhaps, he had ever done before. No one believed he was remaining away voluntarily, and it was impossible he could have left the island, because both the boats yet remained hauled up on the shore, but what had become of him no one could so much as guess.

The long absence was most mysterious, and, repeating for at least the twentieth time the words of the threat, Leander asked, his face paling with fear:

"Do you s'pose he's gone an'—an' —— Do you reckon he'd have the nerve to drown himself?"

"Of course he wouldn't," Ruel replied in what he intended should be a tone of conviction, but his voice trembled despite all efforts to render it steady, and involuntarily he gazed toward the shore of the lake.

"It don't seem as if he had the backbone to do anythin' of the kind, but yet where is he?" and Bill Dean looked nervously over his shoulder, as if fearing there might be some one near at hand ready to do him harm.

"He surely wouldn't do that," Frank added, as if to assure himself rather than the others, and Ruel, understanding that his companions were rapidly working themselves into a nervous frame of mind when the lightest trifles would appear like horrible realities, said with a show of firmness:

"It won't do any good to stand here talking silly. Of course he is on the island, and it's certain he hasn't been so crazy as to drown himself——"

"Then where is he?" Frank demanded.

"That's a question I can't answer, as you know very well. It may be he is hiding in order to frighten us. That is what he must be doing, and if——"

"If he's playin' any sich funny tricks as that I'll make certain he'll be sorry for it when we do come across him," Leander interrupted with a threatening gesture.

"We'll begin at the shore, and make a clean sweep straight across the island," Ruel continued, "and when we find him, Leander won't be the only one who will take a hand at making him sorry for having played such a mean trick. Come on, and let's finish the job as soon as possible."

The boys walked rapidly to that portion of the shore where the boats had been hauled out, and there, under Ruel's direction, they formed a line, each from twelve to fifteen feet distant from the other, thus being able to cover a wide stretch as they marched straight toward the opposite shore.

It was not easy to keep the formation, because of the many thickets through which it was necessary to crawl in order to avoid making a circle around, but Ruel insisted on their walking so slowly that it would not be possible for Larry to give them the slip in case he was awaiting such an opportunity.

"He is in some one of these clumps of

bushes, hoping to keep snug until we have passed him, therefore when either of you come to a dense thicket take plenty of time to make certain he isn't hiding there. We needn't hurry, for it won't pay to give him the satisfaction of fooling us."

There was little need to thus caution the searchers. Before setting out there had been a fear in the minds of all that some serious harm had come to Larry Duffield; but now that these steps had been taken to find him, every fellow felt convinced he was voluntarily hiding himself, and each burned with a desire to teach the foolish fellow a lesson that would not soon be forgotten.

Therefore it was that the search was conducted in a most thorough manner, and no clump of bushes, however small, was passed unheeded, but when they had searched every part of the island, and nothing had been seen of the missing lad, the boys stood silently gazing into each others' faces as if neither dared to speak.

"Well," Leander cried irritably, "what're we waitin' here for? Of course we missed him somehow, but he's bound to be here

somewhere, an' when we do snake him out, I'm promisin' he won't feel good."

It was as if this threat served to allay the undefinable fear which had begun to creep over every member of the party when the searchers were thus baffled, and Bill Dean did his best to laugh as he said:

"I'd never believed Larry Duffield could have fooled us so long, but it'll be all the worse for him when we do finish the hunt. Which way do we go this time?" and he turned to Ruel.

"Suppose we begin at the shore where Leander started when he went over to the village? That will take us across the island at right angles to the way we have been going, and we're bound to smoke him out somewhere."

The boys obeyed this suggestion as if eager for action, and at a swift pace they hurried down to that part of the shore where the raft had been built.

"Make a longer line, so that we can sweep the island from one shore to the other," Ruel cried. "We'll keep just within sight of each other, and make certain not to pass any

thick clump of bushes without knowing what may be hidden there."

Once more did the boys set about the work, this time moving even more carefully than before, if, indeed, that could be possible, and again they emerged from the thicket to the water's edge without having seen anything of the missing lad.

Now no one tried to hide his fear. There was no longer a possibility in their minds that Larry could be on the island, and Leander appeared to be trying to swallow something when Ruel said in a half whisper:

"We'll go right around the island on the shore. If he—if anything has happened to the poor fellow we'll be sure to find some signs of it along the water's edge."

There was no longer any question in the minds of the boys but that something very serious had happened, and they moved slowly along, keeping their eyes riveted on the sand for tokens of a tragedy, fearing, yet expecting, soon to come upon that which would tell beyond a doubt that Larry had met with a fatal accident.

Every ripple on the sand was scrutinized closely; the root of a tree, that had floated in near the shore, caused an exclamation of fear as Leander ran forward to examine it.

Twenty times did one or the other see that which he believed was the lifeless body of the missing lad, only to find himself happily mistaken, and a complete circuit of the island was made without their having found the slightest clew as to his whereabouts.

"I believe we have traveled over every inch of this place, and no matter how snugly he may have hidden himself, we should have found him if he was here," Ruel said in a low tone, and Hot Morgan edged up very close to Leander, as if fearing some harm might come to him if he remained apart from the others.

"But he's got to be here!" Bill Dean cried emphatically. "He never would have taken the chances of swimmin'; he hadn't had time to build a raft, an' both boats are where we left 'em, so how could he leave?"

"Do you think he's hiding, and we didn't chance to come upon him?" Frank asked in a half whisper, and Bill replied in a loud

tone, as if he needed the sound of his own voice to give him courage :

"It don't seem as if we could have slipped him, an' yet we know he's bound to be somewhere 'round here, seein's he hadn't any wings."

"I'll agree that he's got the best of me, if he's hidin' on this island after all our searchin'," Leander said half to himself as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "'Cordin' to what I've seen of Larry Duffield, he wouldn't dare to stay alone very long, an' I can't believe he ever had any idee of hidin'."

"Then where is he?" Bill Dean asked irritably, and Leander replied with a sigh :

"I wish I knew, 'cause if we agree that he ain't to be found by us, it's a case of goin' over to the village an' tellin' his folks the whole story, so's they can say what oughter be done."

Until this moment neither Ruel nor Frank had realized that it might be necessary to make a report to Larry's parents, but now Leander had suggested it, both understood that they would not be warranted in linger-

ing many moments after having decided it was useless to continue the search.

"Who will go over?" Ruel asked after a brief pause, and the lads gazed at each other inquiringly; but no one ventured to make a suggestion, until Leander said hesitatingly, as if not quite certain he was willing to act upon his own proposition:

"I'll pull the boat, if somebody'll go up to the house an' tell his mother, after we get there."

"Of course one of you city fellers'll do it, seein's how you're livin' there," Bill Dean said decidedly, and in a tone of relief because of having thus excused himself from taking any part in the sorrowful business.

"What do you say, Frank?" and Ruel looked inquiringly at his cousin. "Are you willing to go if Leander will row the boat?"

"You're the one who ought to tell the folks," Frank replied quickly. "I wouldn't know what to say. I'll stay here so's to be ready to help when his father comes."

Involuntarily the lads had turned their steps toward the camp when the search on

the shore was come to an end, and now were within a short distance of the spring.

When Frank said that Ruel was the one who ought to carry the mournful tidings to Larry's home, his cousin came to a full stop, as if the mere suggestion was painfully disagreeable; and at the moment when all were gazing inquiringly at him, and in silence, a faint noise, not unlike the groans of a human being, could suddenly be heard in the distance.

The boys started in alarm, looked around timidly, and then, coming closer together as if for mutual protection, stood gazing at each other, neither venturing to speak.

While one might have counted twenty the silence was unbroken, and then, once more, could be heard the faint moaning as of a person in distress.

"That's Larry!" Ruel cried sharply, and the sound of his own voice went far toward allaying the fear which was creeping into the hearts of all, for there was so much of mystery attached to the disappearance of the lad that their courage had fled long since.

"I tell you it must have been Larry who

made that noise!" Ruel cried a moment later, after waiting in vain for his companions to speak.

"It can't be. We've been over every inch of this place without findin' hide nor hair of him," said Leander.

"Don't be so stupid!" and now it was Ruel who displayed signs of irritation. "It's bound to be Larry, for there's no other person here except ourselves. We didn't make as close a search as was counted on, and he's among the bushes somewhere. Come with me! Most likely he has been hurt so badly that he can't crawl into sight!"

"But who could hurt him?" Hot Morgan asked, and it seemed much as though his own question gave him yet further cause for alarm, for he hung back as if in fear.

"We can find that out later; but it is of no use to stand here talking about it," and Ruel set off in the direction from which the noise had come, Leander and Bill pressing close at his heels, while Horace Morgan lagged behind.

"Hello-o-o-o! Larry! Hello-o-o-o!" Ruel cried as he advanced, and at the first sound of his voice Hot Morgan leaped backward in

alarm; but, speedily understanding the cause of the outcry, he began to call the name of the missing boy, and, as Leander afterward said, it did him solid good to be able to make a noise.

Straight across the island the boys walked, until they were nearly at the opposite shore, without having seen or heard anything, and then, as they came to a halt in obedience to Ruel's example, the moaning sound was heard directly behind them, whereupon Bill Dean demanded angrily, as if believing his companions could answer the question:

"I'd like to know the meanin' of all this funny business? Larry must be up in a tree, an' is tryin' to make a fool of us, else somebody has landed here without our knowin' it."

"Don't talk like a silly!" and Leander wiped the perspiration from his face in a way which told plainly of his perplexity. "If anybody had come, we'd seen their boat, an' if Larry has been up a tree all this time, makin' fools of us, it'll be the sorriest job he ever tackled! I'll have him out this time, or know the reason why!"

Then Leander retraced his steps, looking

amid the foliage without giving any heed as to where he walked, with the result that before he had taken twenty steps his toes caught under a treacherous root, throwing him headlong, and in nowise bettering his temper.

"Wait till I get hold of you, Larry Duffield!" he called angrily. "If you won't be the sickest feller that ever saw Caughnawaga Lake, then I'm way out of my reckonin'."

In the meanwhile the other lads had been peering among the branches of the trees, rather than giving heed to what might be beneath their feet, and when Leander had done with making threats, the noise as of some one groaning could be heard close at hand.

Now even the city boys began to appear uncomfortable in mind, and surely they had good cause. It seemed certain they had gone over every foot of the island in careful search without discovering any place in which even a cat might have remained hidden from view, and there were no trees near at hand where a lad as large as Larry could have found refuge.

CHAPTER XX

THE CAVE

THERE was no question but that the city as well as the country boys were frightened when a series of groans appeared to answer Leander's threats against the missing Larry.

It surely seemed as if the noise had come from beneath their feet, and they stood gazing at each other in silent dismay, hardly daring to look around lest some terrible sight be seen.

Until now, no one save Hot Morgan had given signs of fear, but from this moment there was never a fellow in the party who made any effort to conceal the fact that he was thoroughly well frightened.

While one might have counted twenty the five lads stood silent and motionless, gazing into their companions' faces and unconsciously moving nearer each other as if for mutual protection. Then Leander, speaking with evident difficulty, and moistening his lips with his tongue nervously, asked of Ruel:

"What'll we do? It's certain Larry ain't anywhere 'round here, an' I don't like that funny kind of a noise, 'cause it can't be a bird or a animal ——"

"Then what is it?" Bill Dean interrupted. "I ain't stuck on hangin' 'round this bloomin' island when sich a racket is goin' on, an' if you fellers wanter twit me with bein' scared, you won't be comin' far from what's a fact!"

It was as if this confession of Bill's unloosened the tongues of the others, and Frank said in a tremulous voice:

"I did think I wanted to stay here a while, now we've got everything fixed about as it should be, but I'm willin' to pull out this very minute if the rest of you say the word."

"I'll say it mighty quick," Hot Morgan squeaked in a thin, frightened tone as he pushed his way between Leander and Ruel. "It don't take but a little of this kind of business to give me all I want."

Ruel understood that the others were expecting him to take the lead in whatever was done, and while it was not pleasing to confess that he was afraid to remain on the island, it seemed as if there was nothing left but to take

to their heels lest some mysterious danger suddenly confront them.

"It seems as if we were showing ourselves childish to be scared away by a noise, and yet when we keep hearing what sounds like some one groaning and can't find out what is making it, we wouldn't be very comfortable on the island, especially after dark."

"Then we'll go right away?" and Hot looked wonderfully relieved in mind; but a cloud of fear came over his face when Ruel added:

"As I look at it, we are cowardly to run off before finding out what has become of Larry. I believe we ought to send over to the village and wait here till Mr. Duffield comes. Then if we want to go, it won't seem like a mean trick."

"I'll start right off an' tell Larry's folks that they're needed here mighty bad!" Horace Morgan cried. "It won't take me such a dreadful while to paddle across in the canoe, an' the folks from the village can get here before dark."

Hot would have started at full speed for the shore where the boats had been left but

for Ruel, who said sharply, and as if he had suddenly decided upon his course of action:

"Let's wait till we make one more search, and if after we have hunted all through these thickets again we find no signs of Larry, we'll all go to the village."

"Then don't let's hang 'round here any longer," Leander said, impatiently. "I'd be willin' to leave this very minute, an' have every feller in town call me a 'fraid cat; but if you say it's to be more searchin', come on, so's to finish the job as soon as possible."

As he spoke Leander plunged into a thicket of fir bushes close at hand, and the others were forming in line to conduct the search as it had been begun, when a sharp cry from Leander, followed by a sound as of some one scrambling desperately among the foliage, caused them to halt very suddenly, while their faces paled with fear.

"Jump in an' give me a hand here," came in a stifled voice from the thicket. "There's a big hole here, an' I'm 'bout half way inter it! Move quick, or I'll be ——"

The sentence was not finished, for at that instant came a noise as of a heavy body fall-

ing, followed by the dull swish of earth as it pours down a declivity.

While one might have counted ten the boys stood staring at each other in amazement and fear, to be startled into a consciousness of the situation by hearing Leander cry indistinctly, as if he was half smothered:

"Come on, you fellers, else we'll be smothered to death. Larry's here, an' he acts as if he was a good deal more'n half dead!"

"Where are you?" Ruel cried, as he ran forward swiftly, the others following his example, and Leander could be faintly heard as he replied:

"Down here in a hole. It's a reg'lar trap, an' there's a whole lot of stuff in here."

"What kind of stuff?" Frank asked excitedly; but Leander was not in the mood for giving details.

"It'll be time enough to find all that out after you've pulled us up. I ain't certain but that Larry's in a bad way, an' we oughter do somethin' for him mighty quick."

By this time Ruel had made his way to

the very edge of what appeared to be a deep hole in the midst of a dense thicket, and was trying in vain to peer down; but the gloom was so profound that he could not distinguish any object.

"Can you get hold of my hand?" he asked, as he thrust his arm into the excavation. "I can't make out how deep down you are."

"It seems as if I slid a long ways; but there was so much earth came down with me, that I didn't strike very hard on the bottom. Larry is lyin' across a lot of boxes, an' I can't seem to get any sense inter him."

"I ain't hurt so very much; but I began to think I'd be left here to die," Larry could be heard saying in a faint voice. "When I tried to climb up the sides the dirt caved in, till I'd got a good many falls."

"Why didn't you yell to us?" Frank asked.

"Yell? That's 'bout all I've been doin' ever since I fell in here, till it's as much as I can do to talk out loud," and now one could guess, from the tone of his voice, that Larry was growing irritable.

"It's no use," Leander shouted. "I've been tryin' to get hold of your hand; but it must be a good deal higher than I can reach. You'll have to get a rope."

"I don't believe there is such a thing on the island," Ruel replied mournfully, for by this time he was beginning to believe that the situation was far more serious than it at first appeared.

"Take the painters from both boats. By tyin' 'em together you oughter have enough to reach the bottom of this place, for it can't be more'n twelve or fifteen feet deep, 'cordin' to the looks of the top."

"I'll tend to that job!" Hot Morgan shouted, and before any one could speak he was off, running at full speed in the direction of the shore.

"How did you happen to fall into that place, Larry?" called Ruel.

"I tumbled in, same's Leander did."

"But what was you doin' in this clump of bushes?" Bill Dean demanded sharply. "It's so thick that a feller can't much more'n push his way through."

"I tumbled inter the hole same's Leander

did," Larry replied evasively, and the tone of his voice caused Leander to suspect the truth.

"You allowed to crawl inter the bushes an' hide, so's to make us think somethin' had gone wrong!" Leander cried angrily.

"I wasn't jest thinkin' of it that way," Larry replied, hesitatingly, and Bill Dean shouted:

"Tell the truth for once in yer life, Larry Duffield! You'd never stuck your nose inter such a clump of firs as this, if it hadn't been to hide from us!"

"Waal, p'rhaps I did count on keepin' outer sight a spell, 'cause it seemed as if all hands of you tried to jump on a feller, no matter how square he was actin'," Larry finally admitted, and Leander said angrily:

"I have been feelin' mighty sorry on your account, thinkin' you'd hurt yourself bad; but now that we're gettin' at the truth of the business, I'm hopin' you got a full dose. Playin' the baby by hidin' in the bushes jest 'cause the rest of us wanted you to do your share of the work! It would have been 'bout the right thing if you'd broke your leg."

"I ain't certain but I have," Larry whined, and Leander interrupted him to say, savagely:

"You know a bloomin' sight better. 'Cordin' to the way you've been squirmin' 'round since I struck the bottom of this place, you're sound as a nut. An' to think that jest 'cause of your foolishness we've been racin' all over this island lookin' for your dead body! It would serve you quite right to leave you here till you'd had enough of playin' the baby!"

"I've had enough already," Larry whined, and the arrival of Hot Morgan with the painters from both boats put an end, for the time being, to the reproaches of his comrades.

"Here are the ropes," Ruel called to the imprisoned lads. "I'll send down one end so you can see if we have length enough."

"All right; lower away," Leander cried impatiently, and an instant later he added, "I've got it all right, so stand by to haul in. I'll make this end fast under Larry's arms, so's there won't be any question 'bout yankin' him out, an' then I can come up hand over hand, after I've had a look at this stuff here. Now, then, pull away, an' once you've got him out, put him where he won't do hisself

any harm, for he ain't to be trusted by himself for a little minute."

It was a short job to hoist Larry out, and, if the truth must be known, the lads on the surface were not gentle in their handling of him, remembering how much anxiety and alarm he had caused them.

Larry came up looking much the worse for wear. His clothes were torn in a dozen places, and the many scratches on his hands and face told of the fruitless efforts made to clamber unaided out of the trap which, as Bill Dean said, had been set for "fellers what hadn't any sense."

"I thought one spell I'd have to stay till I died!" he cried as he came to the surface. "It was awful in that hole all alone."

"Worse than it would have been in camp, where you'd had to lug as many as two pails of water in a day?" Bill Dean asked mockingly as he seized Larry by the coat collar to pull him over the edge of the excavation.

"Look here, fellers," Larry said imploringly, as he made his way with considerable difficulty out through the thicket into the sunlight, "I know it was a mighty mean

trick for me to play; but I've been paid out in great shape, an' you won't find me makin' such a mistake ag'in."

"If that's the case it's a mighty good thing you tumbled inter the trap," Bill Dean muttered half to himself, and then shouted to Leander, "Are you ready to come up, old man?"

"First I want to find out what there is down here. Can't one of you run over to the camp for a candle?"

"Sure, but what do you care 'bout the stuff? I'm allowin' it's only a lot of rocks an' roots, 'cause there couldn't be anythin' else in such a place."

"It's more'n that, an' I'm beginnin' to believe I can guess what it is. Hurry on with the candle, for if I ain't makin' the biggest kind of a mistake, there's a chance for us to scoop in a hundred dollars!"

"What do you mean?" Ruel cried in perplexity, and Leander replied impatiently:

"Send one of the fellers after the candle, an' I'll soon tell yer. Don't hang 'round talkin', for there's no tellin' how soon somebody will come to break up the game!"

"What does he mean?" Frank asked wonderingly of Bill, and the latter cried in a tone of mingled anger and amazement:

"It beats me, an' that's the fact. P'rhaps he hurt hisself tumbling in, an' has gone off his head. Skip out for a candle, Hot. It begins to look as if this bloomin' island had set everybody by the ears!"

Horace Morgan started off at full speed toward the camp, and Larry followed limpingly and feebly, as if having received serious injuries during his imprisonment, but displaying no curiosity as to the meaning of Leander's odd commands.

"Ain't you going to wait till we find out what there is in the hole?" Frank asked laughingly, as Larry limped away, and the lad replied sulkily:

"I've had all I want of the place, an' a good deal more! Lander can stay there till he's gray-headed, if it'll do him any good; but I'm through. Seems like I was starvin'!"

CHAPTER XXI

A DISCOVERY

Hot did not return immediately with the candle, and, as may well be supposed, the curiosity of the boys who were gathered around the excavation was aroused to a high pitch by Leander's words.

"How can there be a chance for us to scoop in a hundred dollars, no matter what he may have found down there?" Frank asked in perplexity, and Bill Dean replied in a whisper:

"He's hurt hisself tumblin' inter the place, I tell yer, an' has gone clean off his base. Of course there ain't a chance for us to make a single cent, no matter how many holes we find on this bloomin' island; but he's got the cranky idee inter his head, an' I've allers heard that when folks gets funny, same's he is, the only way is to make out that you are in the same box."

Then Bill Dean, with a view to soothing the supposedly unfortunate Leander, leaned

far over the excavation, as he said in a particularly cheerful tone:

"I reckon you won't mind waitin' a spell, seein's how Hot ain't any great on speed; but he'll come after a spell, an' then you can have a whack at that hundred dollars you've been tellin' about."

It was evident that Leander was surprised by hearing his comrade speak in such a wheedling tone, for he asked sharply:

"What's the matter with you, Bill Dean? You're talkin' like as if one of us was a baby."

"That's all right, Lander; I'm stickin' to yer every minute, no matter what turns up. We'll have that hundred dollars when Hot gets back with the candle."

"What do you know 'bout it?" and Leander's tone was almost threatening. Whereupon Bill made certain gestures with his fingers, touching his own forehead significantly in explanation to Ruel, that Leander Leighton was indeed in a very bad way mentally, and replied, as if talking to a child:

"I've got the whole thing down fine, old man, an' am countin' on standin' right behind you, no matter what happens."

"You're crazy!" Leander roared in angry tones. "I'd like to know what's the matter with you, anyway. Here, let down that rope, an' pull me out! If you're gettin' queer in the head it's time somebody was givin' you a shakin' up. Pass me the rope!"

"He's got everythin' mixed," Bill whispered to Frank, "an' I'm almost afraid to let him out, for there's no knowin' what he'll do!"

"He seems to know what he's talking about," Frank replied in perplexity, "and even if he——"

"Send down that rope!" Leander shouted savagely. "I don't count on stayin' down here while you're actin' so much like an idiot!"

"There's nothing the matter with Bill," Ruel said as he lowered the rope, "but there's no reason why you shouldn't come up. Perhaps it is the best thing you can do, for I'd like to know what you meant by scooping in a hundred dollars."

"Hold that rope taut, an' I'll soon tell you what I mean," Leander said sharply, and Ruel had no more than time to obey before

he was swarming up, hand over hand, so vigorously that all three of the lads were forced to put forth their utmost strength in order to withstand the strain.

"Now what's the matter?" Leander demanded of Bill Dean, when he was on the surface once more.

"There ain't anythin' wrong with me," was the prompt reply.

"Then what did you mean by sayin' you knew all 'bout the hundred dollars?"

"Didn't you say there was a chance to scoop it in?" Bill began hesitatingly, and Ruel, understanding that there was likely to be serious trouble between the two if the matter were not explained promptly, said frankly:

"You may as well know that Bill had begun to be afraid you'd gone wrong in your head and was trying to soothe you, I suppose."

"Me wrong?" Leander cried in perplexity. "What made him think that?"

"'Cause you was makin' wild talk 'bout scoopin' in a hundred dollars when you couldn't make that much if you should sell

the whole bloomin' island!" Bill replied stoutly.

Leander looked at his partner in silence while one might have counted twenty, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

"Thought I'd gone loony, eh? Say, Bill, you ain't more'n half as smart as some folks think you are. How much did Nahum Baker offer to give if the stuff what was stole outer his store last June could be brought back to him?"

"A hundred dollars—Leander! Is that the stuff down there?"

"That's what I'm thinkin'. There are a lot of boxes an' bundles, as nigh as I can make out, an' if it ain't what the burglars took I'm askin' what it is?"

Neither Ruel nor Frank had a very clear idea of what their companions were talking about until Leander condescended to explain that two months previous burglars had entered the shop of Mr. Baker, stealing therefrom a large lot of goods, and the trader had offered a reward of one hundred dollars for the recovery of the same, together with a like amount for the arrest of the thieves.

Leander declared that the hole into which he had fallen while trying to find Larry was partially filled with what appeared to be an assortment of merchandise, and it was no more than reasonable to suppose this excavation might have been made, or found, by the burglars, otherwise how account for the goods?

"It surely seems as if you might have stumbled upon the thieves' hiding-place; but yet there may be no more than a lot of empty boxes," Ruel said thoughtfully, and Leander asked promptly:

"Who'd take the trouble to bury a lot of boxes on this island?"

The arrival of Hot Morgan with a candle put an end to what might have become an argument, and Leander hurriedly made his preparations for descending to examine that which had been come upon through Larry's ill temper.

Both Frank and Bill Dean were eager to assist him in the work; but he insisted that more than one at the bottom of the excavation would prevent the search from being made in a thorough manner, and appealed to Ruel.

"It is Leander's right to have the handling of whatever may be below there," Ruel said firmly. "He is right when he says no more than one can work to advantage, and we will wait here till he has done."

"I'll send everythin' up as fast as I can overhaul it," Leander added. "Then you'll really have the first sight of the stuff," and without waiting to parley longer, he slipped down the rope, which he had already made fast to the stoutest of the bushes.

If the lads had been excited before one may well fancy in what frame of mind they were when it seemed certain they had come upon a burglar's storehouse, and they overhung the opening, hardly daring to breathe lest the delightful spell of adventure be broken.

Hot Morgan, who had not heard Leander's statement, plied Bill Dean with questions, but that young gentleman was in no mood to go into details.

"Just keep quiet till we see what comes up," he said in a tremulous whisper. "I couldn't talk to my own mother while we're waitin' to find out if Lander has got the thing down right."

"What thing? What does he think there is in the hole?" Hot persisted, but Bill gave no further heed to him, for at that instant Leander shouted:

"Haul in on the rope, an' then tell me whether I was makin' any fancy guesses? If this don't bring us in the hundred dollars Nahum Baker offered, then I'll eat my hat, an' his, too!"

The boys eagerly did as had been directed, and when a small wooden box, bearing the inscription: "N. Baker, Lake Caughnawaga," was brought into view, Bill Dean gave vent to a whoop of triumph.

"That's the stuff, all right!" he cried. "How much more can you find down there?"

"I can't tell exactly, 'cause while Larry was flounderin' 'round in here he pulled a lot of dirt down, coverin' everythin' five or six inches deep. 'Cordin' to what I can feel, I'd say there was more'n we could put inter one of the boats. Lower the rope; it'll be a big job to take it all out, an' we won't have any too much time before night."

Ruel, who had been looking critically at

the box before him, now interrupted the excited Leander by calling down to him :

"If you and Bill feel certain this has been stolen from Mr. Baker, it strikes me that the best thing you can do is to let him see the goods just as you found them. Perhaps the burglars didn't leave all the plunder on the island, and if you don't disturb what's below, the owner can't accuse us of having taken any for our own use."

"I'd like to hear him sayin' we took any of the stuff!" Leander cried angrily, and Bill Dean added hotly :

"He couldn't do that, 'cause if we wanted to play funny with him there wouldn't be a need of lettin' anybody know what we'd found."

"All that is true enough, but it seems to me you'd be wiser to let him see everything just as you found it," Ruel said earnestly. "I don't allow that Frank and I have anything to say in the matter, for you were the one to hit upon it, and, because this box has his name on it, you are not far off in assuming that all the stuff is his."

"I'd like to know why you haven't as

"YOU'LL HAVE YOUR SHARE"

much to say about this thing as either Bill or me? We're one crowd, or have been since we fellers got the worst of bein' funny with you, an' if there's a hundred dollars comin' outer this business you'll have your share."

"That wouldn't be fair," Frank cried, and Bill Dean began to give his views on the subject, but Leander interrupted him by shouting peremptorily:

"Pull me up! We'll settle matters before goin' any further, an' I don't seem to have my share of the chinnin' while I'm in this hole."

Larry Duffield must have heard at least a portion of this conversation, and understood that something of importance was afoot, for, forgetting that "he had had enough of the place, and was starving," he came at full speed from the camp, arriving at the excavation just as Leander was drawn up from the pit the second time.

"What's goin' on here?" he demanded sharply, but no one save Hot Morgan seemed to realize that he was present.

"What's the matter?" he demanded irritably. "What're you fellers makin' sich a fuss about?"

"Leander has found the stuff that the burglars stole from Nahum Baker, an' he's goin' to get the hundred dollars reward," Hot replied, eager to impart the wonderful news, and drawing attention to the box by kicking it. "This is part of what was stole, an' Ruel thinks we oughter have Mr. Baker here before takin' out any more, so's he can't say we monkeyed with it."

Larry gave one quick glance at the box, and then turned fiercely on Ruel, as if believing he was about to be deprived of his rights in some way.

"If there's any hundred dollars comin' outer this thing, it belongs to me an' father. I'm the one what found the stuff, an' he owns this island, so you fellers ain't in it a little bit!"

"Go back to the camp an' hold yer tongue!" Leander cried angrily. "You talk 'bout findin' the stuff! Why, you was so scared you didn't know there was anythin' in the hole but your own precious body, an' now claim you found it! Go back, or I'll make you wish you'd never heard of Indian Island!"

"Hold on, Leander," Ruel said mildly, as he stepped between Leander Leighton and Larry. "Tell him what you told us about all hands sharing in the reward, and then he'll understand that we aren't trying to get the best of him in any way."

"There won't be any sharin' in any way!" cried Larry, and he pounced upon the box as if to carry it away without loss of time. "The rest of you fellers don't come in on the reward at all, 'cause I found the hole, an' this island belongs to father!"

Larry was so excited and insistent that even Hot Morgan understood it would be useless to make any attempt at reasoning with him just then, and Leander looked inquiringly at Ruel as if asking what course should be pursued; but the latter shook his head, stepping back a few paces to show that he would not interfere.

Understanding that he was at liberty to manage the affair, so far as Larry was concerned, he advanced until within a few inches of the excited lad, and said sharply:

"You won't make any row 'bout this thing, Larry Duffield, an' the sooner you get

it outer your head that you an' your father are runnin' us, the better it'll be for you. If we get hold of the hundred dollars Nahum Baker has offered to give, it'll be divided square between all hands ——"

"I tell you it belongs to me, 'cause I found the hole, an' father owns the ——"

"We've heard enough of that song, so shet down on it," and Leander laid his hand heavily on Larry's shoulder. "If you can hold yer tongue, I'll let you stay here; but if not, back you go to the camp, even if I have to lug yer!"

"I found the hole, an' father owns the island!"

"Here, Bill," Leander cried, turning suddenly to face his partner. "Take the bloomin' idiot, an' if he opens his mouth ag'in, give it to him good an' hot, for we're goin' to have this business fixed up right, without any talk sich as he's makin'."

"I found the hole, an' father ——"

Larry did not conclude the sentence, for Bill Dean cut it short by suddenly pulling him backward to the ground and sitting on him.

CHAPTER XXII

QUESTIONABLE VISITORS

WITH Larry silenced, the lads could discuss the question as to whether it might be unwise to disturb the burglars' hoard any further, and to this Ruel stoutly maintained that Mr. Baker should be notified before the remainder of the goods had been taken out.

It was no more than natural that the boys should be eager to see what had been thus oddly discovered; but when Frank agreed to his cousin's proposition, and set forth the possibilities in such glowing and startling colors, the country lads began to believe that perhaps it might not be well to satisfy their curiosity immediately.

"Somebody will have to row all the way from here to the village jest to tell him the news," Leander said, as if this was a strong argument against acting as Ruel had advised, and Frank replied quickly:

"If you are to get a reward of one hundred

dollars for finding the goods, you can well afford to paddle across the lake more than once."

"Then s'posen he backs down on his offer?" Bill Dean asked, pressing Larry's face yet deeper amid the leaves to prevent him from interrupting the conversation.

"That part of it has nothing to do with whether you intend to notify him of what you have found," Ruel said decidedly. "If he has regularly offered a reward for the recovery of the goods, I fail to see how he can well go back on his word; but if he is a man who would do such a thing, then there's all the more reason why you should be exceedingly careful how you give him a chance to accuse you of anything crooked."

"I reckon you're right," and Leander moved away from the excavation as if he was fully convinced Ruel had the best of the argument. "That's what we'll do, an' now who'll go over to the village?"

"One of you boys must go, because neither Frank nor I know where this Mr. Baker is to be found."

"All right, we'll tackle the job, though I'd

like mighty well to know how much stuff there is in the hole. Will you go?" and Leander turned toward Bill, who was having quite a difficult task to keep Larry quiet.

"I'm willin' to, if it's a case of must; but seein's how you found the stuff, it seems as if you could do the job in better shape," Bill replied hesitatingly.

"I don't reckon any of us is very keen on pullin' across the lake; but one can do it as well as another. Let's draw lots, an' whoever gets stuck must start right off, so's to make certain of gettin' back before mornin'. You fix things, Ruel, an' we'll settle the matter in short order."

Ruel did as he was requested by breaking off three twigs, one of which was considerably shorter than the other, and when they were hidden in his hand so that no more than the very ends could be seen, he said:

"Whoever gets the shortest is to go. Which one draws first?"

"I will," Bill cried eagerly. "Larry's got through squirmin' 'round for a spell, so give me a chance, quick!"

Ruel held the twigs toward him, and after

much deliberation Bill made his choice, his face clouding as he drew forth a twig no more than an inch in length.

"It looks as if I had been in too much of a hurry," he said, ruefully. "Are any of the others shorter than this?"

"No; you've got the prize," and Ruel opened his hand to show two twigs, each of which was much longer than the one held by Bill.

"All right; I won't squeal, though I ain't achin' for the job, an' that's the fact. What'll I do with Larry?"

"Let him up, an' if he tries to be funny I'll settle him in short order," Leander said in a tone of command, whereupon Bill released his hold of Larry, who sprang to his feet on the instant, crying shrilly:

"I say that the hundred dollars belongs to me, 'cause I found the hole, an' father owns the island!"

"We've heard all that before, an' you're goin' to give us a rest on it," Leander said, sharply. "If you sing that song again I'll take you in hand, an' it's likely that I won't be so easy as Bill has been. Now get back to

the camp, 'less you want a mix-up with me!"

Larry hesitated just an instant; but at a threatening gesture from Leander he set off toward the shanty at full speed.

"I reckon I'd better take the canoe," Bill said questioningly, and Ruel replied promptly:

"Take the craft which can be handled the easiest. Shall you try to come back before morning?" and Ruel spoke as if he did not think it advisable to make a full night's job of it.

"If Nahum Baker counts on comin' over before mornin' you'll see me with him; but if —— I guess I won't make up my mind till after gettin' there an' findin' out how tired I am. Comin' down to the shore?"

It really seemed their duty to go to the boat with Bill, and all the party, save Larry, who was most likely sulking in the camp, followed the lad who was to notify Nahum Baker that the goods stolen from him had been found.

"Keep Larry where he belongs, an' don't take anythin' more outer the hole till I get back, 'cause I want to see the stuff jest as it

comes up," Bill cried as he took his place in the canoe and pushed off from the shore, and Leander cried emphatically :

"When you get back everythin' will be as it is now, 'less you hang off till after Nahum Baker comes."

"There ain't much fear of my doin' that. If he makes a sign of comin' over to-night, I shall start without waitin' for anythin'," and then, with a flourish of the paddle, Bill began the journey.

"I reckon we'd better go up to the camp," said Leander as Bill started, "for Larry might take it inter his foolish head to haul the stuff outer the hole and hide it."

The others followed him without delay, and it might have been observed that even Ruel kept strictly in the path, as if not inclined to stray among the bushes where the shadows were already heavy, for now it was known that burglars had rendezvoused on Indian Island, everything appeared threatening and uncanny in the twilight of the thickets.

They passed the clump of bushes amid which had been found the burglars' hoard without even glancing toward it, and one

might have fancied they walked more rapidly until arriving near the camp where a view of the southern portion of the lake could be had, when Leander cried :

"Look there! Where are them fellers comin' from? It seems as if they were headin' for this island!"

Gazing in the direction indicated by Leander's outstretched finger, the boys saw a large boat in which were two men, approaching on such a course that made it seem certain the strangers were counting on landing near where the raft had been put together.

As a matter of course, there could be but one thought as to who these men were, and why they were coming. Words were not needed to make it plain that every member of the party was of the same mind.

"What shall we do?" Hot Morgan asked in a tremulous whisper, and because no one else spoke, Ruel said after the very briefest time of hesitation :

"I don't see that we can do anything, except keep our eyes on those fellows, if they come ashore."

"But they'll see that we've been at the

hole, an' then there'll be the tallest kind of a row, for it don't stand to reason they'll go away peaceably after knowin' we've found the stuff!"

"I'll fix that part of it," Leander whispered as he darted off at full speed, and those whom he left behind knew that it was his purpose to efface, so far as might be possible, all evidences of their having been near the excavation.

"S'posen they count on takin' the stuff away, without payin' any attention to us?" Hot asked, and the pallor on his face told that he was in a woeful state of fear.

"We won't hunt around to find trouble," Frank said hastily. "It isn't likely they would advertise themselves as burglars. What I've been thinking of is how to keep them here till Mr. Baker comes."

"Don't! Don't be so foolish!" Hot exclaimed. "We're in trouble enough without doin' any crazy thing like that. If they'll go away, after findin' that we're campin' here, that's all I ask!"

"We are talking as if it were sure those men are the ones who stole the goods, when,

as a matter of fact, they may be going up to the village without the slightest intention of stopping here. Let's get about our business, and look after the supper."

Hot Morgan acted upon this suggestion as if it gave him great relief of mind to get into the shanty once more, where he would at least be screened from view, and as he opened the door a voice, gloomy and threatening, came from one of the bunks:

"You fellers are gettin' yourselves inter a mighty big lot of trouble by the way you're actin', for I found the hole, an' father owns this island, so ——"

"Oh, give us a rest!" Hot cried nervously. "We may all of us wish, before to-morrer mornin', that we'd never seen the island, for the burglars are comin', an' nobody knows what they'll do after it's known that we—I mean, that you found what was hid!"

"Where are they?" and Larry looked cautiously around as he pulled the blanket yet more closely to his chin.

"Comin' in a boat straight as a die for this place. Of course they must be the ones what hid the stuff, 'cause nobody else would want

to land here. Tell 'em that you found the hole, an' your father owns the island, an' p'rhaps they'll see to it that Nahum Baker pays you the hundred dollars."

"They can't blame me for it," and now the blanket shut out from view even Larry's head. "Of course I found the hole; but it was Lander who found the stuff, an' he's the one they'll have to settle with."

If Hot Morgan had not been thoroughly frightened himself, he might have seen something comical in Larry Duffield's retiring so suddenly from the position he had taken when the goods were first discovered. As it was, however, the lad set about preparing supper so energetically that one might well have supposed he hoped to escape whatsoever in the way of punishment the burglars decided to deal out, on the pretext that the cook would not be supposed to have a hand in unearthing treasures while he had so many household duties to perform.

Larry was silent with terror when the city boys entered the camp, and if he had any idea of showing himself, such a thought must have been driven from his mind when Leander

came in hurriedly, as he said in a whisper:

"I've fixed things the best I knew how, so's they won't think we've been at the hole, an' here are the painters—I'll chuck 'em under this bunk."

"We may be mistaken as to their coming here," Frank suggested, and Leander added:

"Not a bit of it. They've pulled in to the shore already, an' oughter pass here in less'n five minutes, if they count on goin' to the hole. We'll leave the door open, so's they can see that somebody's here, an' ——"

"Don't! Don't let 'em think we're on the island, an' then p'rhaps they'll go away after gettin' the stuff!" Larry Duffield cried in an agony of terror as he sprang to a sitting position in the bunk, as if moved by a spring after the fashion of a jack-in-the-box.

"If they take the goods away there's no chance of getting the reward Mr. Baker has offered to pay," Frank said laughingly. "You know it belongs to you because of having found the hole."

"But I didn't!" Larry cried emphatically

and angrily. "I only tumbled inter it. Lander found the stuff!"

"Then you're through claimin' that all the money oughter come to you?" Leander asked with a grin, and before Larry could make reply Hot Morgan said in a hoarse whisper, as he looked out of the window:

"Here they come! They're lookin' at this camp mighty hard, an' it strikes me we oughter keep out of sight!"

"If we hadn't found the goods, we'd be outside in a jiffy, in order to learn what they are doing here," Ruel said to Leander, and the latter replied promptly:

"You're right! Go ahead an' do the talkin'; you're better at that than I am."

Ruel opened the door of the shanty just as the strangers came opposite, and hailed them with a cheery "good-evening," which was replied to curtly as the men came to a halt and stared at the lads curiously.

"Were you looking for any one?" Ruel asked.

"What are you doin' here?" and the man spoke in anger.

"Camping out, as you see. We have hired

this island from Mr. Duffield, who is the owner."

"How long have you been here?" the man asked in a surly tone.

"About a week, I reckon. We haven't kept a very close count of the days."

"When do you allow to leave?"

"That's something we haven't decided on, and even though we had, I'm not certain we should feel obliged to give you the information," and now it was Ruel's turn to speak curtly, whereupon Larry whispered hoarsely from the bunk:

"What's the sense of stirrin' 'em up? Don't make an idiot of yourself by gettin' on a high hoss when we're ——"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that instant Leander flung himself upon the cowardly lad and whispered threateningly:

"If you open your mouth ag'in till I give the word, you'll get the worst thumpin' that a boy ever had!"

CHAPTER XXIII

OPEN THREATS

THE strangers stood as if amazed because Ruel had dared to answer them so curtly, and then both turned away, holding a whispered conference, after which they moved slowly off in the direction of the hole.

Not until the unwelcome visitors were so far away from the camp that there was no possibility they could overhear the conversation of the boys, did Leander release his hold of Larry, who gazed after the men in evident fear, but took exceeding good care not to expose himself to view. Realizing that his threat had not been fully understood, Leander shook the lad roughly, as he repeated the words.

"I won't open my mouth if you'll only stand by me, Lander!" Larry said with a mournful whine. "It's awful to be on this island without anybody to take our part,

'cause the burglars wouldn't stop at anythin' if they thought we'd found what is hid in the hole."

"I reckon the whole crowd of us wouldn't stand still an' let only two men act very funny," Leander replied in a tone of irritation. "We ain't all of us such cowards as you an' Hot, an' if the burglars think we're easy, they're goin' to get the surprise of their lives."

"But you wouldn't do anythin' to make 'em mad?" Larry asked falteringly, and Leander replied stoutly:

"Don't you think for a little minute that I'd stand with my hands in my pockets while they lugged off the stuff that's in the hole; an' I'm allowin' the city fellers would keep mighty snug to me if it came to a row."

Then Leander Leighton went out of the camp to hold counsel with Ruel and Frank, who were watching for the reappearance of the men.

"I reckon there isn't any doubt but that those fellows are the burglars, and they have come to take away their plunder," Ruel said in a low tone as Leander came up, and the

latter asked, as if he had no doubt as to the reply:

"Of course you won't stand still an' let 'em do anythin' like that?"

"Certainly not; but the question is whether we could make much of a fist at stopping them, in case they are armed, as would seem probable."

"I'm allowin' that we might make a mighty good try, for it don't stand to reason they'd dare shoot, or do anythin' of the kind, after the five of us have seen them so plainly that we could answer to both, if they should be taken prisoners later."

"There are three of us, for, of course, we can't count on either Larry or Hot Morgan," Frank said as if thinking aloud, and Leander added:

"We don't need the cowards. If them men start to lug off the stuff I'll agree to stop 'em without askin' anybody to lend me a hand."

"How?"

"By makin' off with their boat an' ours. It wouldn't be much of a trick to pull around the shore, an' hook on to their craft——"

Leander did not have time to explain his plan fully, for at that instant the two men came hastily from amid the bushes, and Ruel said hurriedly:

"They've learned that we found the goods, and now it's a case of letting them understand that we count on putting a stop to any attempt at carrying away the stuff, until after Mr. Baker gets here."

"That's the size of it. Go ahead an' do the talking, Ruel, an' I'll be right at your back if them fellers try to make a row!"

There was no time to say anything more privately, for the strangers had advanced so rapidly that they were now standing directly in front of Ruel, who stepped forward a pace as if to meet them.

"What right have you fellows got on this island?" one of the men asked in an angry tone.

"More than you have," Ruel replied decidedly. "We have hired the island, and are camping here. If that is all you want to know, there's no reason why you shouldn't leave at once, for we have no desire to entertain visitors."

"I want to know!" the man said with a lazy drawl. "Did you think we wanted you to look after us?"

"We shall, whether you want it or not——"

"Been snoopin' 'round where you had no business to be, an' found what didn't concern yer, eh?"

"I suppose you mean that we came across a lot of goods that had been buried? Yes, we found them, and what's more, we count on giving the rightful owner a chance to recover his property."

Just for an instant the man stood as if bent on making an attack, and then, bursting into a hearty laugh, he said in what he intended should be a tone of good-fellowship:

"A reg'lar boy, ain't yer? Found somethin' in a hole, an' made up your mind it had been stolen? Let me tell you, sonny, you've barked up the wrong tree. We left that stuff here the other afternoon on account of havin' too big a load in the boat while the wind was blowin' half a gale. It has been bought an' paid for."

The thought came to Ruel that possibly the

man was speaking the truth, and if that was the case he and his comrades might make considerable trouble for themselves by trying to prevent the visitors from taking their lawful property.

While one might have counted five he stood as if undecided as to the proper course, and then he said slowly:

"If you were forced to leave goods here because your boat was overloaded why didn't you stack them up in that shed?" and Ruel pointed to the tiny building which had been erected as a shelter for fuel.

"We'd been chumps to leave the stuff where every Tom, Dick an' Harry could see it. No, sir, it cost too much money for us to take sich chances, so we buried it, an' now count on takin' it away."

"We believe the goods were stolen from Mr. Nahum Baker, who has offered a reward for their recovery, and you will not be allowed to move them until he has had a chance to find out if they are his," Ruel said, speaking firmly, but stepping back in order to range himself by the side of Frank and Leander.

The strangers must have mistaken his motive in thus seeming to retreat, for both stepped forward threateningly as if to follow up the advantage supposed to have been gained by the lad's fears, but Ruel speedily undeceived them by saying sharply:

"There is no reason why you should come any nearer. Stay where you are till we have settled this."

"But it's settled, son," the man cried. "We're goin' to take away the stuff that cost us our good money, an' you boys will come mighty nigh gettin' hurt if you mix in with what don't concern yer."

"You won't carry anything away from this island until after Mr. Baker has said whether it belongs to him," Ruel said firmly, and one of the men asked:

"Is there any chance Baker will come over here?"

"He'll be here early in the morning, if not before. We sent for him after finding the goods."

That this information caused the men decided uneasiness could be seen by the look each gave the other and, without another

word, they wheeled suddenly about, disappearing an instant later amid the bushes.

"A blind man could see that those fellers are the burglars," Leander said musingly, and Larry, crouching close by the side of Ruel as if for protection, asked pleadingly:

"Can't we get away from here before they kick up a row? There'll be a terrible time if you try to stop 'em from luggin' the stuff off."

"Say, Ruel," said Leander suddenly, "why not let Larry an' Hot go, if they feel like it?"

"What do you mean?" and now Ruel looked surprised.

"They wouldn't lend us the least little bit of a hand, if it came to a mix-up, an' we'd be better off without 'em."

"And it wouldn't do any good for us to send them away."

"I ain't certain 'bout that. If we should send the burglars' boat adrift it's sure they couldn't lug the stuff away; but if we set about doin' anythin' of the kind, they'd fight mighty hard. Now s'pose Hot an' Larry sneaked down to our boat, goin' through the bushes so's they wouldn't be seen, an', after launchin' her, pull 'round an' hitch onto the

craft the men came in? It could be done easy enough, for them duffers never'd have any idee of what was goin' on while us three stayed here in plain sight."

Ruel and Frank looked the surprise they felt because Leander had hit upon such a promising plan. Then came the question as to whether Larry would have courage enough to attempt anything of the kind, even though there could be no danger so far as he was concerned.

"Leave that part of it to me, an' I'll see they're only too willin' to do what we want," Leander said confidently, and without delay he went into the camp, literally dragging Larry after him.

The other boys remained on watch, for it was important, whether Leander's scheme was carried out or not, for them to know exactly where the strangers were, and before five minutes had passed Leander came out of the camp looking triumphant.

"They were only too glad of the chance to clear out before the row began, for they believe we're bound to have the biggest kind of a fight. Larry wasn't so very keen for towin'

off the burglars' boat; but Hot had spunk enough to tackle the job."

"Have they really started?" Ruel asked in surprise.

"Sneaked out through the window a minute ago. I've promised to give 'em warnin' if the burglars show any signs of goin' down to their boat."

"If they succeed in towing the craft off, all we'll have to do is keep an eye out on the burglars, without troubling our heads very much over what they do, for it will be impossible to take the goods away until after Mr. Baker gets here," Frank said with a note of satisfaction in his voice, and Leander added laughingly:

"'Cordin' to the way I look at it, we needn't even keep an eye out, seein's how all hands of us are tied up on the island. It may be, though, that they'll make things lively for us after findin' out what a trick we've played on 'em."

"I reckon we can hold our own, unless the fellows are armed with revolvers, and even then, it wouldn't do them any good to shoot us. I'm ——"

The sudden reappearance of the men put an end to Ruel's speech, and the three boys faced about very suddenly, prepared for any kind of a battle, however desperate, in order to prevent the burglars from going to the shore while Larry and Hot were trying to get possession of the boat.

"We've come to have jest a word with you, an' if you don't give heed to it, so much the worse for all three," one of the men said, with a threatening gesture. "Me an' my partner have come for what belongs to us, an' we're goin' to take it now—now, d'ye understand? If you kids so much as raise a finger toward tryin' to stop us, we'll put you where fingers ain't any use. Hear me, now! Leave us alone, an' we won't trouble you; but try to play any tricks, an' you'll get a dose from this!"

The man drew from his pocket a revolver, as he ceased speaking, and, after flourishing the weapon, turned about, going once more in the direction of the hole, his comrade following close behind.

"If Larry and Hot keep their wits about them, they should have the boat before those

fellows can get to the shore with a load of the goods," Ruel whispered.

"One of us ought to slip through the bushes in order to know if they succeed," Frank suggested, and Leander added:

"There's no need of runnin' very fast, 'cause I told Hot to whistle when he got the boat inter deep water."

He had hardly more than spoken when a shrill whistle was heard from the water, and Ruel said with a long-drawn breath:

"Now they are shut up here on the island until some one comes from the village. And now how can we protect ourselves until Mr. Baker comes?"

CHAPTER XXIV

A TIMELY ARRIVAL

ALL three of the lads felt positive the men would be enraged on finding that they had been trapped.

"Of course they'll know we had a hand in towing the boat away, and we can't blame them for wanting to square matters with us."

"Well?" Leander asked impatiently as the city boy ceased speaking. "Are we goin' to stand here so's they can get at us?"

"I was trying to decide what would be best. We might shut ourselves up in the camp; but it wouldn't be a long job for two men to break down the doors, and then we'd be forced to take what they were of a mind to give, without any show of running away."

"When do you allow Mr. Baker can get here?" Frank asked of Leander, and the latter replied quickly:

"If he believes the story Bill tells, an' can find Rube Jepson to keep shop for him, there's no reason why he shouldn't be here

before midnight. Nahum Baker is mighty keen after everythin' that belongs to him, an' when Bill tells that we've found a lot of stuff, which may be what was stole by the burglars, I'm reckonin' he'll come over on the jump."

"In that case it is only a matter of five or six hours before he gets here, and it strikes me we ought to be able to hold the shanty that length of time, unless those men are too free with the revolver," Frank said as if trying to convince himself, and Ruel turned quickly to face Leander as he asked:

"Which do you think we should do? Take the chances of hiding in the bushes from the burglars, or use the camp for a fort?"

"I'd rather take my chance in the shanty," Leander replied promptly. "Allowin' that they'll be mad enough to shoot, we couldn't keep under cover if the men made a reg'lar hunt. In the camp we stand some little chance, 'cause even if they break the door in, we can make it mighty hot for whoever tries to get inside."

"Come on, then, and we'll get ready for a siege," Ruel added with a laugh as he led the

way into the shanty, and once there, with the shutters closed and bolted, Leander set about piling every movable thing against the door, saying grimly as he worked:

"All we're after is to keep the thieves out as long as possible, an' allowin' it'll take 'em quite a spell to get in if we work things right. S'pose Frank stands watch while we get ready? There's a big crack near the stove, where he can see all that's goin' on."

No time was lost in discussing this proposition. Frank took his station as Leander had suggested, while Ruel aided Leander to the best of his ability, and no more than five minutes had elapsed before the door was barricaded in such a manner that even though it should be totally wrecked the enemy would find it difficult to gain an entrance.

It was well they had made their preparations hurriedly, for the work was hardly more than finished to the satisfaction of Leander when Frank whispered:

"Here they come! Won't there be a howl when they find the boat gone?"

In a twinkling Ruel and Leander were by

the side of their comrade, where it was possible for them to see the supposed burglars coming out from amid the foliage, each literally staggering under a heavy burden of boxes and packages in paper wrappings.

The shadows of evening were gathering rapidly, but the watchers in the camp could see the men quite distinctly, though they made their way among the bushes instead of striking out boldly into the beaten path, and it was possible to note that the enemy cast anxious glances in the direction of the shanty, as if fearing the boys might contrive to throw obstacles in their way.

"If Leander hadn't hit upon the plan of towing the boat away they could get off with all their plunder before any one from the village could reach the island," Ruel said, half to himself. "I wonder where Larry and Hot are by this time?"

"Pullin' the best they know how for the other side of the lake," Master Leighton replied, with a laugh. "You can set it down as a fact that the two cowards won't stop till they're safe an' snug at Larry's home."

The picture thus presented by Leander was

very comical to the city lads; but they were yet to learn that the cowardice of Larry and Hot was to serve them a good turn before the adventure had come to an end.

The boys had hardly more than checked their mirth when the sound of rapid footsteps could be heard in the distance, and Ruel said grimly:

"They've found that their boat's missing. Look out for squalls now!"

Leander drew out from under the bunks one of the stout clubs which the city boys had left there and took his stand near the door, as he said threateningly:

"I'll agree to look after the first burglar that busts his way in, an' if I get one crack at him it's a sure thing he won't make much more trouble!"

"Hello! you little villains in the camp!" came in an angry voice from the distance. "What have you done with our boat?"

"Isn't she where you left her?" Ruel asked, as the foremost of the men came into view from the crack through which he was peeping.

"You know well enough that she ain't!

Tell us where she is, or we'll make you wish this island was sunk an' you with it!"

It was Ruel's purpose to keep the man talking as long as possible, for every moment thus gained brought so much nearer the time when Mr. Baker would arrive, but Frank, eager to let the enemy understand how thoroughly he had been outwitted, put an end to his cousin's plan by crying exultantly:

"She must be well over on the other shore by this time, and you'll stay here with us till the people from the village can arrive!"

"What's that?" And then all was still while one might have counted twenty, during which time Ruel whispered in dismay:

"You've settled it for sure. I was hoping we could keep them talking a while, for every moment thus spent is so much gained for us."

"P'rhaps it's just as well," Leander added grimly. "Seems like as if Frank had paralyzed 'em, an' they don't know what to do!"

He speedily learned that he was mistaken as to the paralyzing portion of the matter, for on the instant came the cry, sounding as if the speaker was directly outside the door:

"Open up, you young whelps, or I won't leave enough of you to bait crows with! Open this door, I say!"

"What for?" and Leander stood ready with upraised cudgel to defend the camp in case an entrance was forced.

"I'll show you what for! D'ye think we're goin' to let three young villains like you interfere with us?" and the fellow began to kick against the frail door.

"You must think we're easy!" Leander cried with a jeering laugh. "We're countin' to keep you on this island a spell, an' we'd be crazy to come out jest 'cause you say so!"

If the lads had expected an angry reply they found themselves mistaken. Much to their surprise no answer was made, and, listening intently, it was possible to hear the sound of footsteps, as if the man was going away.

"Now what's up?" Frank asked in perplexity, and Leander replied confidently:

"They've gone to see if one of our boats is here. It'll take 'em quite a spell to search along the shore, an' we may as well have a bite to eat."

By this time night had fully come, although it was not so dark that he who peered through the crack would fail to see any one passing along the path, and after assuring himself that the enemy was not within his range of vision, Ruel stepped back toward the table, on which Leander was already placing a varied assortment of food from their generous store, as he said :

"Bill might be back with Mr. Baker, if he is coming to-night, before they can make certain that there are no boats on the island," and Leander added in a tone of satisfaction :

"That's what! We may as well make ourselves comfortable, 'cause there'll be nothin' doin' for an hour or more. I don't believe it would be real safe to light a candle, for them fellers might come back sooner'n we count on."

Frank dropped the match as if it had burned his fingers, for he it was who had taken a candle from the shelf behind the stove, and said, half apologetically :

"We got rid of those scoundrels so easily that I had almost forgotten it would be possible for them to come back."

Then, as if they had been fasting a full four

and twenty hours, the boys made an attack upon the food; but before they had well begun Leander asked, as he sniffed the air suspiciously:

"Did you blow out that match before you threw it away?"

"Of course I did. Why?" and Frank looked up in surprise.

"I thought I smelled smoke."

Little heed was given to what the other lads believed to be a clear case of imagination, and the attack on the food was continued five minutes or more, when Leander sprang from his chair in excitement, as he cried:

"I do smell smoke, an' what's more I can come near seein' it. The match must have dropped into the wood-box, an' ——"

"Look, look there!" and Ruel pointed toward the door, at the bottom of which could be seen a tiny thread of flame creeping along the edge of the wood. "Those villains have set fire to the camp!"

During a full minute the three boys stood silent and motionless, gazing at the wavering point of light which had in it so much of menace, and then Leander, seizing a full

bucket of water, dashed the whole against the flame, saying as he did so:

"They didn't count that we had water here, an' ——"

"Now will you open the door?" came in a jeering voice from the outside. "We're bound to pay off you young whelps, even if we burn the shanty with you in it!"

"Keep a sharp lookout for more fire, and then be sparing of the water," Ruel whispered. "We'll stay here as long as we can, and when the flames come too near, take our chance through the window. Bill must have gotten to the village before this."

Crouching near the floor to relieve themselves from the smoke, the boys watched intently for the first sign of flame on the inside; but before any other evidence of fire had been seen, the roar from the outside, and the light which came through every tiny crack, told that the narrow porch on the end of the shanty was in a blaze.

"We can't stay here a great while longer," Leander said, as he crept toward the rear window, club in hand.

Surely it did seem as if the moment

had come when the boys should be making an escape. The front portion of the building was in flames, with the fire creeping through every crack, when Ruel said grimly:

"All right, Leander, we'll make the break. I'm allowing we'll catch it hot from the burglars; but they can't give us any worse than we'll get here within the next ten minutes, if we stay."

Then Leander threw open the shutter, and a shout of triumph from the outside told that the enemy were aware of their movements.

"I'll go first," Ruel cried sharply, as he endeavored to push Leander aside, but that young gentleman held his ground, saying grimly:

"After all that's happened on this island, it's no more'n fair I should take the rough end of it. You fellers get in a lick while they're tacklin' me, an' we may have a chance of bestin' 'em, after all."

Even as he spoke Leander began to clamber out of the window, heedless of the fact that the two men stood ready to receive him; but at the very moment when one of the burglars raised his clenched fist to strike the lad as he leaped, a cry from the path in the direction

of where the canoe had been moored caused the burglars as well as the boys to cease movement for the instant.

Brief though the pause was, it was sufficient for the downfall of the burglars.

Half a dozen men from the village were upon them with such effect that they were prisoners in a twinkling, and Bill Dean was dancing around them in high glee, as he shouted for the benefit of his comrades:

"It's mighty lucky you sent Larry an' Hot off with the boats, 'cause they roused up Elish jest in time for him to give us a tow with his motor boat, an' I'm allowin' we didn't get here much too soon!"

There is little more to tell of the camp on Indian Island, for within ten minutes after the opportune arrival of Bill Dean with Mr. Baker and his friends, the shanty was burned to the ground.

That very night the city boys went back to the Duffield farmhouse with Elish, but before their vacation was over they shared in the reward which Mr. Baker had offered for the recovery of his goods and the apprehension of the burglars.

Two hundred dollars was the amount he paid without very much grumbling, and this was divided into six equal portions, despite Larry's claim that he should have the largest share, since he "found the hole an' father owned the land."

The burglars were very soon sentenced to long terms, and the boys were naturally the heroes of the village. Except for Larry, who was very fond of telling how he and Hot Morgan trapped the burglars, all the boys talked very modestly of their exploits.

"And the best of it all is," said Leander emphatically, "that we've all got to be good friends."

"You're right there," declared Ruel heartily. "Frank and I will never forget you and Bill Dean. And say, before the end of the summer suppose we four go over and camp on Indian Island again for a few days!"

And that was what the four friends did.

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